

VISUAL ANALYSIS & REINTERPRETATION

AMY DÍAZ-INFANTE

INSTRUCTOR IN PRINTMAKING, DRAWING, AND DESIGN

Note to Educators:

This project was developed as a final project for an introductory level Basic Design course at City College of San Francisco. Over the course of the semester, students gain an understanding of each Design Element and Design Principle (listed in this document) through lectures and smaller exercises and assignments. In this final project, students have an opportunity to:

- 1) Engage in written Formal Analysis (the study of a work of art based on the use of Design Elements and Design Principles),
- 2) Engage in further written analysis through research to gain greater context for the work of art and/or the artist that will enhance their interpretation of the work, and
- 3) Create their own work of art based on their analysis in which they present the meaning or message of the work in a new way that speaks to their own experience and contemporary context

Adapting this project:

* In this project, students select at least three design elements or principles to base their formal analysis on, but this project could be adapted to various education levels or turned into a smaller project by selecting just one design element or principle that students are introduced to and asked to analyze.

* This project can also be applied to other works of art. This can be a good project for a museum visit in which students select a work of art themselves to study. The Visual Analysis Guide can be used as a reference and place to sketch and make notes as students study their selected work of art.

REMAKING THE MURAL THROUGH VISUAL ANALYSIS AND REINTERPRETATION

Project Overview

In this project you will create a work of art based on a portion of Diego Rivera's Pan-American Unity Mural. This mural is very large and covers many themes so you will focus on just one portion to use for your design. The work of art you create will be a reinterpretation – meaning it will not be a direct copy, but instead you will make some changes to the design to change the meaning of the portion that you selected.

In preparation for your reinterpretation piece, you will study the mural using visual analysis. This analysis will help you understand and articulate what the content (the meaning or message) is behind the portion you selected. From there, you will consider how you want to adapt this meaning or message to connect with your own life experience and contemporary context.

At the end of this project, you will submit your reinterpretation piece (at least 11"x17" in size) along with a two-page, double-spaced, written analysis.

Project Steps

Part 1: Selection

Take your time in looking at the mural. *What stands out to you as you look from a distance and take it all in? What do you notice as you take a closer look at each panel? What parts of the mural hold your attention most? What parts bring up the most questions in your mind?* Select the portion of the mural that you find most interesting to study and reinterpret for your final project.

Part 2: Formal Analysis

Use the Visual Analysis Guide attached to help you in your formal analysis of the design elements and principles. You can make notes directly into your packet.

Part 3: Further Visual Analysis

In addition to the formal analysis, you will need to dive deeper into the content (the meaning or message) and/or context of your selected portion of the mural. In the back of your Guide are examples of additional ways you might approach this analysis. A good resource for additional background on the mural is riveramural.org

Part 4: Written Analysis

Using your notes from your Visual Analysis Guide and further research, describe your analysis and reinterpretation of your selected portion of the mural.

This analysis should be at least two pages long, double-spaced, and 12pt font.

Your written analysis must include:

- 1) Formal analysis of the most relevant design elements and principles (at least 3)
- 2) Further analysis based on additional research. State clearly what framework of additional analysis you are using (for example – Contextual, Biographical, or Gender analysis).
- 3) A description of your reinterpretation - What did you change about the content (the meaning or message) of the work and what design choices did you make to support this reinterpretation?

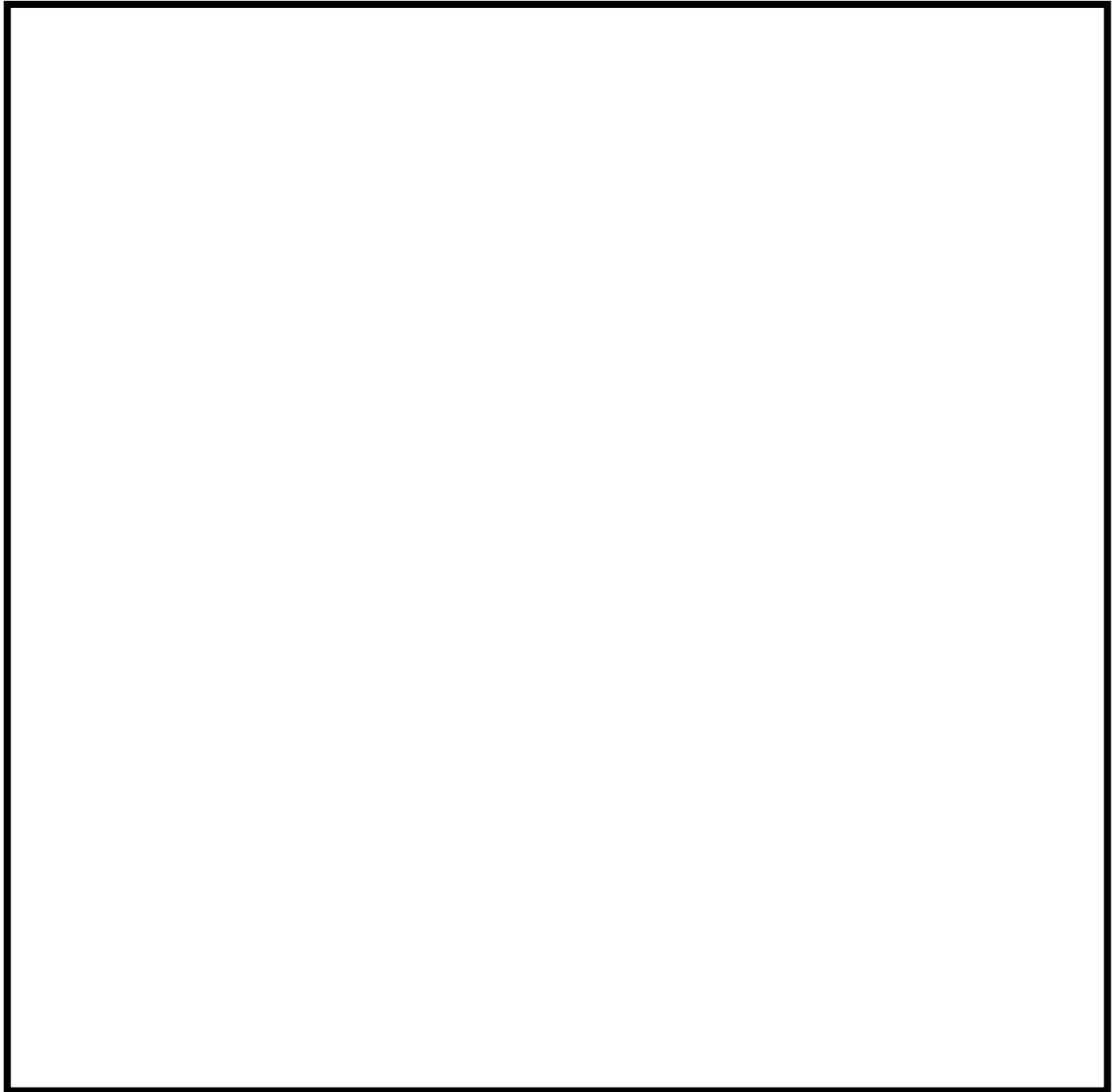
Part 5: Reinterpretation

Create your reinterpretation artwork.

- Your work must be at least 11" x 17" in size.
- You can use any medium.
- Your work must reference but not replicate exactly the portion the that you selected.

VISUAL ANALYSIS GUIDE

Draw what you see – create a sketch of your chosen piece. Do not worry about how accurately you can draw. This is a way for you to look more closely at the portion you selected. Try to capture the overall composition and notice any new details that pop out to you as you sketch.



Title of Work:

Year:

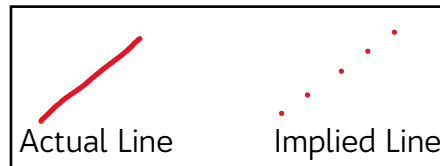
Artist:

Medium:

DESIGN ELEMENTS - Review the Design Elements below and make notes about how these are incorporated in the portion of the mural that you selected. For each element, consider: *How does the way this element is used inform the content of the mural?*

LINE

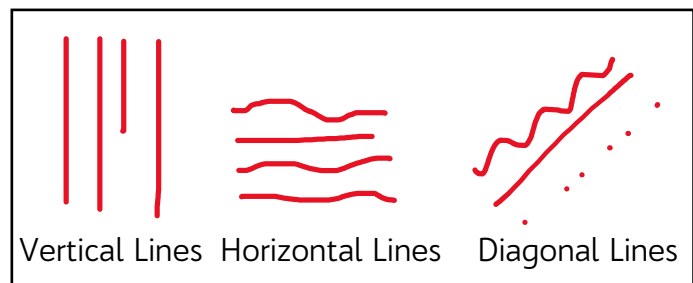
Lines can be actual or implied:



Psychic Lines are a type of implied line created by following the gaze of a subject depicted in the work of art:



Line Direction can communicate Different feelings or ideas:
Vertical lines can imply strength and stability. Horizontal lines can imply calm and rest. Diagonal lines can imply action and movement.



What actual lines do you see in your selection? What implied lines do you see in your selection? What psychic lines do you see in your selection? What does this imply about what is being communicated in the piece?

SHAPE & FORM

A shape has two dimensions while a form has three dimensions. In each case, we can consider what type of shapes or forms are being used. Just like lines, shapes can be actual or implied.

What actual shapes do you see? What implied shapes do you see? What positive or negative shapes do you see? Are the shapes geometric or organic? What does this imply about what is being communicated in the piece?

COLOR & VALUE

Value relates the relative lightness or darkness of a depicted area. In the color wheel below, the value of each color is lighter as you move towards the center and darker as you move towards the perimeter.



What colors do you see depicted? Is the work monochromatic, or does it use analogous (next to each other on the color wheel) or complementary (across from each other on the color wheel) colors? Are the colors in the warm or cool range? What kind of mood or energy is created by the color palette? Is there any personal or cultural significance to the color(s) used?

VOLUME & MASS

Although the mural is a 2-D painting, it is also very large in scale and adhered to a very hefty framework.

What does the mass and scale of the mural imply? How does it make you feel standing in front of it? In terms of the composition, where do you implied mass? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

SPACE

In a 2-D work of art space can be depicted through perspective. The artist may depict a natural perspective or intentionally create a shallower or more exaggerated depth of field.

Does the space in the mural seem shallow or deep? Do you see any linear perspective? Do you see any atmospheric perspective? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

TEXTURE

What kind of texture do you see depicted? Does it seem natural or congruous with the objects depicted? Does it impart any kind of feeling? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

TIME & MOTION

Although this is a still image, time and motion can be implied.

Do you see anything that depicts the passage of time? Is there any motion implied, and if so, what kind of motion? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

DESIGN PRINCIPLES – the principles of design describe ways that design elements can be used and combined to inform the overall composition. You might think of the design elements as visual language, and the design principles like visual syntax. For each principle, consider: *How does the way this principle is used inform the content of the mural?*

EMPHASIS & FOCAL POINT

A focal point is where eyes are drawn to in a work of art. There may be one main focal point or a few. An artist can use design elements to draw the viewer's attention to an area and create emphasis, or conversely, the artist might draw attention purposefully away from an area to create an area of subordination. This interplay of emphasis and subordination can be used to move the viewer's eye around the piece in a particular direction or pattern.

In looking at your selected section, do you see a particular focal point? Where do you believe the emphasis is in this section? Is there any example of subordination; is there anything you didn't notice at first but did later after closer viewing? In looking at the mural as a whole, where/what do you think is the focal point? Does this relate to the focal point in the section you selected, and if so, how? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

CONTRAST

In considering all of the design elements, do you see areas of contrast created in your selection? Does the contrast or lack of contrast create any focal points, harmony, or disharmony? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

PATTERN & RHYTHM

Do you see any element repeated, and is it a regular or irregular repetition? Is there a simple repetitive, progressive, or alternating rhythm? What kind of energy is created with this rhythm? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

SCALE

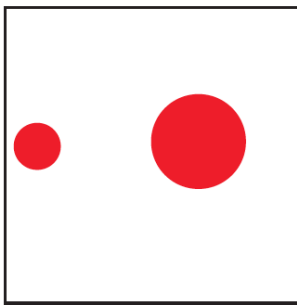
What kind of scale is used in the mural and in your selection? Is it a natural scale, monumental scale, or hierarchical scale? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

UNITY & VARIETY

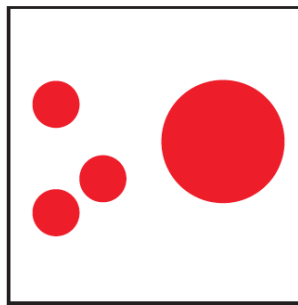
Is there a variety of elements that create visual interest? Does it maintain a sense of order or disorder? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

BALANCE

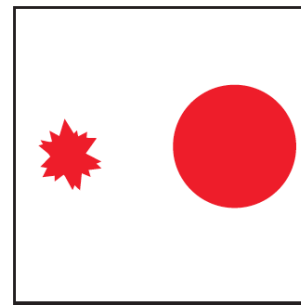
Two halves of a work of art can be balanced through symmetry but also in various ways through asymmetry. An artist may also purposefully choose to create imbalance to create a sense of motion or uneasiness.



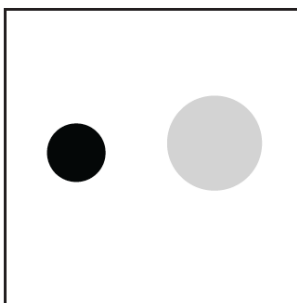
A large object can be balanced by a smaller object placed closer to the edge of the frame.



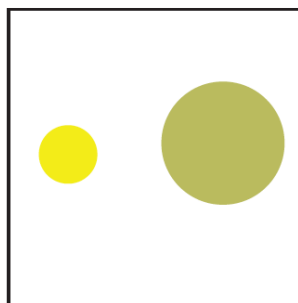
A large object can be balanced by numerous smaller objects.



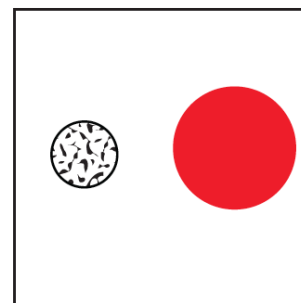
A large simple object can be balanced by a smaller complex object.



A large object can be balanced by a smaller object of darker value.



A large of a muted hue can be balanced by a smaller object of a purer hue.



A large smooth object can be balance by an object of complex texture or pattern.

What kind of balance do you see depicted? What do you think this is meant to communicate?

VISUAL ANALYSIS FRAMEWORKS – In analyzing your selected work of art through the design elements and principles, you have engaged in what is called “formal analysis”. To deepen your interpretation and inform your reinterpretation, below are other visual analysis frameworks to consider. Select at least one to include in your written analysis.

BIOGRAPHICAL

Consider the artist’s personal life, relationships, and their values and beliefs. How can this influence the content of the work?

SOCIO-POLITICAL / HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Consider the time and place in which this artwork was made and that the artist lived in. What was happening historically, culturally, socially, and politically that may inform the content of the work?

GENDER & SEXUALITY

Consider how people of different genders or sexualities are positioned in the work, its making, and its reception. What are the power dynamics at play based in gender and sexuality in relation to the artist/maker, the subject(s), the viewer(s), and the institution and society?

ICONOGRAPHIC

Consider the icons and symbology that are depicted in the work. What cultural or religious context do these symbols reference and what can we determine through this about their individual meaning and how it informs the overall content of the work?

STYLISTIC

Consider the style in which this work of art was executed. Does the media, method, and style in which the work was made fit into an existing school or movement, or does it break markedly from them?