Surrealism and Visual Analysis
Surrealism and Visual Analysis

Student Self-Management and Regulation

During the course of this elective students will have regular opportunities to work on the theoretical requirements presented in this booklet in class.

Students must also expect to spend time outside of class researching and completing these tasks each week.

Students requiring assistance should communicate this with their teacher either during classes or via email. Every effort will be made to ensure prompt responses. Draft work being sent to be ‘checked’ immediately before submission (24 hours) will not be commented on.

Assessment

Formative assessment tasks will take place at intervals through this course for the teacher and students to respond to and consolidate the level of learning, understanding and skills being developed. These tasks are learning tools and will not be included in the summative assessment at the end of the course. These tasks may include;

- Class tests
  - Pop quizzes
  - Multiple choice
  - Short answer tests
- Class participation
- Classroom observations
- Oral presentations
- Homework tasks

Summative Assessment and Reporting

The study of Surrealism and Visual Analysis skills during this course is assessed formally through the following tasks;

1. Surrealism Assignment
2. Visual Analysis Test (in class)
3. Examination

These will be reported on in the student’s individual semester report.
Surrealism Assignment

This assignment is to be produced and presented in the back of your work book. Pages should be presented with consideration given to the amount and layout of both text and images. Students must include as much information as possible to demonstrate their full understanding of this art movement, the period of time and the artists involved.

NB. A ‘page’ refers to a full A3 presentation.

Students must photocopy these pages, reducing them to A4, for submission to Ms Fowler.

1. Create an opening page for this assignment. Include the following;
   - Title
   - Dates
   - Names of key artists
   - Map of the part of the world where this movement developed.
   - Synopsis of the philosophy of the movement.

2. On the next page, respond to the following questions with short statements and images;
   - What were the circumstances or conditions at the time that influenced these artists? (historical references)
   - What was it like to be an artist at this time? Refer to two specific artists.
   - How did society and the art world respond to the work these artists were producing?

3. Page 3 should identify and discuss the variety of media used and subject matter tackled by Surrealist artists.

   Include 6 examples from different artists with a written response that acknowledges the type of artwork, its date and details, and discusses the artist’s choice of subject matter.

4. Students are to present a full page in the back of their visual diary for each of four of the following artists to research individual practice in greater depth.

Specific Instructions

Each artist must be presented on a separate page and include the following;

1. Artist’s biography (100 words) and photo/self portrait
2. 4 samples of the artist’s surreal art works
3. Written response discussing the artist’s use of the elements of art within their images. (200 words each artist)

A sample of this style of writing will be provided by your teacher on the course website.
http://mystudioart.com/year-10-fine-art/visual-analysis-of-art-works/
You must select two artists from each group.

**Group 1.**
- Salvador Dali
- Giorgio de Chirico
- Rene Magritte
- Andre Masson
- Paul Delvaux
- Paul Nash
- Yves Tanguy
- Josef Istler
- Pierre Roy
- Man Ray
- Dorothea Tanning

**Group 2.**
- Max Ernst
- Henri Rousseau
- Marc Chagall
- Clovis Trouille
- Roland Penrose
- Edward Burra
- Edward Wadsworth
- Felix Labiss
- Oscar Dominguez
- Marie Cernu
- Joan Miro
The Aim of Writing a Visual Analysis

Writing a visual analysis is partly a technical activity, but it is also a reflective and subjective one where your personal responses are central. Your analysis should therefore integrate the descriptive language of formal observation with phrases which are more speculative. The language of your visual analysis should be simple and precise. When describing the object or artwork, use the present tense to reveal the work from the viewer’s perspective. The object or artwork itself is often the subject of the description, rather than the artist or designer. For example:

The pot shows…

The painting demonstrates…

Your description of the technique involves explaining and detailing the means by which the designer or artist has achieved a particular effect. Use evidence or examples from the work to demonstrate what you mean. Be evocative. Think about how you would describe the artwork or design to someone who has not seen it. Which features are most intriguing? How do they contribute to the overall effect? How does it make you feel?

Thick paint has been applied with rough brushstrokes creating an interesting, dynamic texture.

These descriptions of the object and technique form the basis of your interpretation of the meaning or intention of the work. Often, you are only guessing at the artist or designer’s meaning and this uncertainty can be conveyed through verbs like evokes, creates, appears and suggests which reflect thinking or guesswork. Other conditional forms, such as may, could and seems can also be used.

This choice of subject seems intended to…

The artist appears to be implying…

These words may also be used in your evaluation of the work. Here, you should feel free to express your opinion but remember to support your views with evidence.

Overall, this work conveys a strong sense of joy, especially through the use of vibrant, exciting colours which left me feeling elated long after I left the gallery.

The writing style for this exercise should be formal. You are making a statement of your observations and interpretations. Do not use first person expression such as I think or I can see.

Persuasive writing attempts to convince the reader to accept a particular point of view or to take a specific action.

Expository writing is writing that is designed to convey information or explain what is difficult to understand.

A Visual Analysis is a combination of both persuasive writing and expository writing. You must convey the facts and explain the subject matter and arrangement of the artwork, as well as express your interpretation of the artist’s intentions, how they have produced, composed and expressed themselves through the art work.
Sample Visual Analysis

Complete a detailed visual analysis on ‘Woman, Bird by Moonlight’ 1949 by Joan Miro.
You must include:
1. an introduction, minimum of four sentences;
2. a detailed description of the subject matter referring to the Principles of Design;
3. a thorough analysis referring to the artist’s use of the Elements of Art;
4. and a conclusion where you make a judgment on this artwork in terms of how well or
poorly it represents the aims of the surrealist movement.
Approximately 600 words - be descriptive!

Miro no longer prepares his paintings; he gives them not the slightest thought in the
world before taking brush or pencil in hand ... The forms install themselves on the
canvas without a preconceived idea. He begins them by spilling a little colour on the
surface and then circulates a dipped brush around the canvas. As his hand moves the
obscure vision becomes more precise.16

JOAN MIRO
(1893–1983)
Women, Bird by Moonlight,
1949
Oil on canvas, 81.5 × 66 cm
Tate Gallery, London
Joan Miro (1893-1983)

*Women, Bird by Moonlight* (1949)

‘Women, Bird by Moonlight’ was painted by surrealist artist, Joan Miro in 1949. It was produced using oil paint on canvas and is medium sized, 81.5 x 66 cm. Miro has expressed this image using Breton’s concept of ‘psychic automatism’, a method of producing pictorial art, as paintings and collages, associated chiefly with the Dadaists and Surrealists. In this approach artists strive to allow the impulses of the unconscious to guide the hand in matters of line, colour and structure without the interference of conscious choice. Miro paints without any preconceived thoughts or ideas about what he is going to paint, and instead forms the image on the canvas as he goes.

*Women, Bird by Moonlight* is painted in a seemingly childlike way, with simple figures and lines. The features and background of the painting are portrayed using dark, earthy colours and black, creating a warm, harmonious feeling with and around the expressive figures. White was used to establish contrast and definition in the lines and shapes of the figures which have been grounded by the darker, heavier application of brown/black paint at the bottom of the painting in the background. There is an equal balance of positive and negative space in this painting that with these simple shapes creates the impression of gentle movement. The figures appear to stand comfortably in this space. This also allows the audiences eyes to flow smoothly around the composition. Stars and a crescent moon are included at the top of the canvas in the middle and to the right. Further down the canvas Miro has included five figures, these ones slightly more complex, however made up quite simply of basically drawn shapes. In the centre, the taller figure seems to represent a parent, possibly a mother. As the other figures around this one are smaller, they could be children or even a pet.

Miro has created an intimate scene in this painting with his expressive approach. The organic shapes used in the image have a soft personal line to them. This lack of structure and rigidity helps the audience to appreciate the symbolism of these characters, rather than focussing on a specific portrait or personality. The clean white lines and shapes in his painting add to the brightness and mood of the scene. The artist has used a limited colour palette, including warm reds and oranges and dark browns and blacks for the shapes. The softly textured application of the paint enhances the impression of calmness in what may have otherwise been a hard, dark image. The top left corner is painted a dirty red/orange colour, and then the colours change as they move diagonally across the painting, eventually becoming a dark but dull grey/brown. This suggests the image is set later in the day, perhaps representing a warm summer or autumn sunset.

Miro has painted very expressively. It can be hard to dissect the bones of what he has painted because so much of it is open to interpretation. His use of line in the image is what makes the picture so engaging. The simple outlines of his shapes create a very sincere and honest image and again, one that seems child-like. Unlike other paintings of the Surrealist movement, this image does not have a realistic approach to the visual presentation of imagery. This can be explained by both the time and motivation with which Miro was painting. This image was painted in 1949, many years after the initial Surrealism movement had begun, so by this stage both the public as well as artists had become more accepting and adventurous with their surrealist art.
Understanding Visual Analysis Language

Learning Task

Define the relevance of these words as they apply to a visual analysis;

Technical

Reflective

Subjective

Speculative

Descriptive

Evocative

Evidence

Precise

Present tense

Perspective

Interpretation

Artist’s Intentions
History of Art

Knowing the period of art that an artwork belongs to is essential in order to complete a quality visual analysis. The dates, social and historical influences are integral to the artist’s training, experience and practices. In the introduction of a visual analysis, identify the relevant period of art and include two to three sentences outlining the relationship to the artwork being discussed.

Learning Task

Find the dates for the following art movements.

- Neoclassicism ( )
- Mannerism ( )
- Romanticism ( )
- Realism ( )
- Impressionism ( )
- Pointillism ( )
- Cubism ( )
- Futurism ( )
- Fauvism ( )
- Abstract Expressionism ( )
- Dadaism ( )
- Surrealism ( )
- Op Art ( )
- Pop Art ( )
Introduction - Getting Started

As with formal writing tasks in many subjects, a visual analysis has specific requirements for each stage;

1. **Introduction**
2. **Description**
3. **Analysis**
4. **Interpretation**
5. **Judgement**

**Introduction**

1. In the first sentence of the introduction, the artist and the art work should be identified with relevant dates.

   **The Persistence of Memory (1931)** is a painting by Spanish artist Salvador Dalí. It is one of his most recognizable works and is widely referenced in popular culture.

2. Include other relevant facts that establish the significance of the art work, such as;

   *First shown at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1932, the painting has been in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City since 1934.*

3. Identify how the art work was created and its size and scale;

   *This painting was produced using oil paints on canvas and is a relatively small piece, being 24.1 centimetres tall and 33 centimetres wide.*

4. Refer to the aims and style of the art movement that this artist and the art work are associated.

   **Surrealism:**
   - Was a movement that relied upon dreams, nightmares and images from the subconscious for its bizarre, fantastic and sometimes disturbing subject matter;
   - Looked to the writings of Sigmund Freud;
   - Often used complex symbolism;
   - Used a highly realistic painting technique to make the images appear almost photographic;
   - Did not draw upon the free use of colour, brushwork and technique as practiced by earlier artists, but tended to return to a more traditional technique.

   **The Persistence of Memory** and its melting clocks was an idea that Dali claims to have developed while eating a runny Camembert cheese. As with many of his images, this work could certainly be something out of one of Dali’s unrelenting dreams and imagination.

   Note that after the artist’s name has first been acknowledged it is appropriate to then refer to them only by their common name, in most cases their surname; Salvador Dali becomes Dali, Rene Magritte becomes Magritte, etc.

5. Complete the introduction with a reference to the style of the art work, how the artist has chosen to present his subject matter.

   *This well-known surrealist piece introduced the image of the soft melting pocket watch through realistically painted manipulated imagery. It epitomizes Dalí’s theory of "softness" and "hardness", which was central to his thinking at the time.*
The Persistence of Memory (1931) is a painting by Spanish artist Salvador Dalí. It is one of his most recognizable works and is widely referenced in popular culture. First shown at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1932, the painting has been in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City since 1934. This painting was produced using oil paints on canvas and is a relatively small piece, being 24.1 centimetres tall and 33 centimetres wide. The Persistence of Memory and its melting clocks was an idea that Dali claims to have developed while eating a runny Camembert cheese. As with many of his images, this work could certainly be something out of one of Dali’s unrelenting dreams and imagination. This well-known surrealist piece introduced the image of the soft melting pocket watch through realistically painted manipulated imagery. It epitomizes Dalí’s theory of “softness” and “hardness”, which was central to his thinking at the time.

Further Information and Commentary on the Persistence of Memory

Expert Interpretations

The Persistence of Memory depicts a scene showing pocket watches, detached from their chains, melting slowly on rocks and branches of a tree, with the ocean as a back drop. A part of the painting is basked in sunlight and a part is shrouded in a shadow. Looking carefully you can see two small rocks, one in the sunlight and the other in the shadow.

Dali frequently used the philosophy of hard and soft in his paintings. The melting watches points to time being flowing and eternal, whereas the hard rocks are the reality of life and the ocean represents the vastness of the earth. There is an orange clock covered with ants. He used the symbolism to convey the decay of time or death (and at times, the female genitalia). The strange human figure in the center could be interpreted, as a formless person we would imagine, while we are in a dreamlike trance.

Dali’s Interpretation

There have been so many interpretations and analysis of The Persistence of Memory, but Dali never himself interpreted or explained his work. The art critic Dawn Ades wrote that “the soft watches are an unconscious symbol of the relativity of space and time”. When Dali was asked if this allusion to Einstein’s Theory of Relativity was true, he replied, rather flippantly, that it was a surrealist vision of Camembert cheese melting in the heat of the sun.

Experts have said that The Persistence of Memory was a painting during his Freudian phase of life, before the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki propelled him into his scientific phase. Whatever Dali wanted to convey by the painting, he took the interpretation with him to his grave. In a strange sort of way, each of us could interpret it in our own way and would all be right. Who knows, that may be what Dali intended.

http://totallyhistory.com/the-persistence-of-memory/

Learning Task

Write an introduction for each of the six images used in Question 3 of the Surrealism Assignment using the guidelines outlined on the previous page.
Description – Principles of Design (Composition)

To start this paragraph consider the most obvious question – *What can you see?*

When starting a new paragraph, refer to the artists or painting by name, not ‘he’ or ‘the painting’. This can be used further into the paragraph to limit repetition.

Describe the overall form, composition and subject matter of the piece. Acknowledge the style of the work, in this case Surrealist, and identify the particular visual links to this art movement.

Include what technique has been used with the chosen medium to create the work. (The medium should have been mentioned in the introduction)

*What materials and processes were used and how? Not lists, descriptions!*  

An example could be, "The oil on canvas painting by Rousseau, *Dream Garden*, portrays a man playing a ukulele while riding on the back of a large tiger through a jungle. Bright. Bold paints have been applied in large solid areas, defining the imagery and creating a sense of lushness and vivacity in the scene." This gives the reader a quick sense of what you are describing and prepares the reader for you to go into greater detail.

Describe the piece in a detailed and systematic way. Start at a logical point, such as the focal point, a corner or the ground floor (if your piece is a building) and describe in detail what you see. Do not hesitate to describe areas that may seem obvious, such as a human face in a painting, because everyone tends to see an image in a slightly different manner. By doing this, you may point something out that your reader may not have seen and you are also detailing your point of view.

Use directional words to guide the reader through your description. You might begin your formal analysis with, "The focal point of the work is the central figure, a man in a conservative black suit with a black bowler hat on his head and a ukulele in his arms." After describing the man, you might write, "below the man is a large tiger that appears to be calmly and proudly striding through the jungle while he carries the man..." Tell the reader where to look next. Give the reader directions by using language such as, "In the upper left corner," "diagonally across from," "beside," or "to the right of."

Detail how the artist employed each or any of the **principles of design** to create the composition/arrangement of their art work.

Use descriptive words, including those listed in the **elements of art** to create a full mental picture of the image being analysed.

- Composition
- Repetition
- Contrast
- Balance
- Harmony
- Unity
- Rhythm
- Movement
- Proportion
- Focus
- Space
- Movement
Principles of Design

**Composition** is the term used for the arrangements of the elements in or the subject matter of a painting. A successful composition draws in the viewer and pulls their eye across the whole painting so that everything is taken in and finally settles on the main subject of the painting.

In his *Notes of a Painter*, Henri Matisse defined it this way:

"Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner the diverse elements at the painter's command to express his feelings."

The **Elements of Composition** in art are used to arrange or organize the components in a way that is pleasing to the artist and, hopefully, the viewer. It helps give structure to the layout and the way the subject is presented. It also encourages or leads the viewer's eye to wander around the whole painting, taking in everything and ultimately coming back to rest on the focal point. In Western art they are generally considered to be:

- **Balance** is the distribution of the visual weight of objects, colours, texture, and space. If the design was a scale these elements should be balanced to make a design feel stable. In symmetrical balance, the elements used on one side of the design are similar to those on the other side; in asymmetrical balance, the sides are different but still look balanced. In radial balance, the elements are arranged around a central point and may be similar.

- **Focus/Emphasis** is the part of the design that catches the viewer's attention. Usually the artist will make one area stand out by contrasting it with other areas. The area will be different in size, colour, texture, shape, etc.

- **Movement** is the path the viewer's eye takes through the artwork, often to focal areas. Such movement can be directed along lines edges, shape and colour within the artwork.

- **Variety** is the use of several elements of design to hold the viewer's attention and to guide the viewer's eye through the artwork.

- **Repetition** works with pattern to make the artwork seem active. The repetition of elements of design creates unity within the artwork.

- **Pattern** is the repeating of an object or symbol all over the artwork.

- **Proportion** is the feeling of unity created when all parts (sizes, amounts, or number) relate well with each other. When drawing the human figure, proportion can refer to the size of the head compared to the rest of the body.
Rhythm is created when one or more elements of design are used repeatedly to create a feeling of organized movement. Variety is essential to keep rhythm exciting and active, and moving the viewer around the artwork. Rhythm creates a mood like music or dancing.

Unity is the feeling of harmony between all parts of the artwork creating a sense of completeness.

Space is the area between and around objects. The space around objects is often called negative space; negative space has shape. Space can also refer to the feeling of depth. Real space is three-dimensional; in visual art when we can create the feeling or illusion of depth we call it space.

Contrast is the combination of different elements of design (e.g., red and green, rough and smooth, dark and white) to highlight their differences and/or create balance, visual interest, or a focal point. Create your own example.

Learning Task:

Using an artwork of an artist that you have researched during the Surrealism assignment, write a full description of the image/subject matter. Refer to as many of the principles of design as are relevant to the chosen image. Describe where and how they are effective in the composition of the artwork using descriptive language.

Approximately 100 – 150 words.
Analysis – Elements of Art

Consider the following questions as you prepare this paragraph;

1. How has the art work been designed?

2. What is the relationship/connection between the materials and the processes used?

3. How do these then relate to the idea or theme being portrayed?

4. What is the relationship between the artworks function and form?

5. How has the artwork been composed? (Yes, this continues on from the previous paragraph)

6. What is the mood being conveyed in the art work?

Identify the subject matter of the art work. Some artwork is pretty straightforward. A painting of a pond may actually look like a painting of a pond. Other art pieces are a tad more challenging. Use your own imagination to gauge what you see in the piece.

Look at shapes, lines, color and overall effect the artwork has to determine its mood. A painting with soft hues and rounded lines may make you feel warm and cozy, giving the piece a gentle and soothing ambiance. Jagged lines, sharp teeth and harsh colors produce a jolting effect.

Examine and describe fine details. This ensures greater depth in the analysis, rather than just presenting a broad overview.

This paragraph should flow on from the previous one on description. Some areas of the art work may be mentioned again, but this should be with more detail and reference to the aim of this paragraph.

Learning Task

Write an analysis paragraph for the painting, *The Garden*, by Joan Miro.

Discuss every element of art as it has been incorporated, or not, into this art work.

120 words
Elements of Art

**Line** is a mark with greater length than width. Lines can be horizontal, vertical or diagonal, straight or curved, thick or thin.

**Shape** is a closed line. Shapes can be geometric, like squares and circles; or organic, like free formed shapes or natural shapes. Shapes are flat and can express length and width.

**Forms** are three-dimensional shapes, expressing length, width, and depth. Balls, cylinders, boxes and triangles are forms.

**Space** is the area between and around objects. The space around objects is often called negative space; negative space has shape. Space can also refer to the feeling of depth. Real space is three-dimensional; in visual art when we can create the feeling or illusion of depth we call it space.

**Color** is light reflected off objects. Color has three main characteristics: hue or its name (red, green, blue, etc.), value (how light or dark it is), and intensity (how bright or dull it is).

**Texture** is the surface quality that can be seen and felt. Textures can be rough or smooth, soft or hard. Textures do not always feel the way they look; for example, a drawing of a porcupine may look prickly, but if you touch the drawing, the paper is still smooth.

Learning Task

Make a list of ten alternate, descriptive words for each of the elements of art listed above.
Visual Analysis Task 1

Rene Magritte (1898-1967)

Les Valeurs Personelles, 1952,
Oil paint on canvas, 80.01 x 100.01 cms

Although he is often grouped with Surrealists such as Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, and Yves Tanguy, Magritte took a somewhat different approach to painting. Rather than creating fantasy imagery, he evoked the strangeness and ambiguity latent in reality. "I don't paint visions," he once said. "To the best of my capability, by painterly means, I describe objects — and the mutual relationship of objects — in such a way that none of our habitual concepts or feelings is necessarily linked with them."

Here, the artist presents a room filled with familiar things, but he gives human proportions to these formerly unassuming props of everyday life, creating a sense of disorientation and incongruity. Inside and out are inverted by his rendering of a skyscape on the interior walls of the room. The familiar becomes unfamiliar, the normal, strange; Magritte creates a paradoxical world that is, in his own words, "a defiance of common sense."

http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/27665

Learning Task

Complete the first three stages of a visual analysis for this image, including;

- Introduction and Subject Matter;
- Composition and other principles of design;
- Analysis using the elements of art;

Research the image on the internet to get additional information to support your analysis.
Interpretation – Visual Literacy and Artist’s Intentions

Regardless of whether the artist intended greater meaning in his art work or not, this is an area which must be discussed. Art production prior to the Modern Art movements of the late 19th century often had clearer purpose or functions. In painting this may have included formal portraiture of significant people, events and religious figures, landscapes of important places and still-life painting.

Learning Task - The question of interpretation?

Discuss the following quote by Dalí:

‘Just because I don’t know the meaning of my art, does not mean it has no meaning.’

- What do you believe he meant by this statement?
- What might this suggest about the nature of art?
- Explain whether you believe his argument can be justified or not.
- Dalí’s work has been interpreted variously by different commentators including Dalí himself.
- What factors affect the way we interpret a work of art? Consider culture, age, personal experience, deference to specialist art commentators.
- To what extent does it matter if there are multiple interpretations of a work that are different to the artist’s intention?

‘Progressive art can assist people to learn not only about the objective forces at work in the society in which they live, but also about the intensely social character of their interior lives. Ultimately, it can propel people toward social emancipation.’ Dali

When completing the paragraph on interpretation and artist’s intentions, take heed of the subject matter. This can say a lot about what is important to the artist or what’s the rage at the time the artwork was created. A modern art work of a downtrodden street may point to the blight of urban poverty. As mentioned before, some historical pieces will give you faces of royalty or scenes depicting revolutions, wars or a farmer plowing a field.

Consider the following questions;

1. What does the art work mean?
2. What ideas do you think that artist was exploring?
3. What feelings or response does the artwork provoke form you, the audience?
4. What imaginative qualities does the art work display?
5. What influences (political, social, historical, religious, etc.) do you think have affected the artist’s approach?

When writing a visual analysis as a class activity, take the time to research the art work. There may be a statement from the artist attached to the artwork to help determine their intentions. This may also help in the final judgment paragraph, when it is necessary to discuss how successfully the artist conveyed both his message and his skill.

In a formal assessment task, you must rely on the information provided or prior knowledge if the actual image has been covered in class. This may not be the case.
Visual Analysis Task 2

Marc Chagall (1904-1988)

_I and the Village_, 1911
Oil paint on canvas
Museum of Modern Art, New York NY

"Chagall here relives the experiences of his childhood, experiences so important to him that his imagination shaped and reshaped them without ever getting rid of their memories."
—H. W. Janson

Learning Task

- Using the text below, expand to create a full and detailed visual analysis.
- Each section should be at least double its original length.

Introduction

_I and the Village_ is a "narrative self-portrait" featuring memories of Marc Chagall's childhood in the town of Vitebsk, in Russia. The dreamy painting is ripe with images of the Russian landscape and symbols from folk stories.

Description

The picture can be broken down into 5 distinct sections. The first at the top right includes a rendering of Chagall's home town, with a church, a series of houses and two people. The woman and some of the houses in the village are upside down, further emphasizing the dreamlike quality of the work. Below that we see a green-faced man who some say is Chagall himself. At the bottom of the work, we see a hand holding a flowering branch. Next to that, an object which some say is a child's bouncing ball -- perhaps a plaything from Chagall's earlier days. Finally, we see the image of a milkmaid layered atop the head of a lamb - a motif common to Chagall. (Cows, bulls and lambs figure in many of Chagall's paintings as cosmic symbols).

Analysis

_I and the Village_ is one of Chagall's earliest surviving works. In it, he ignored the laws of gravity. Objects are upside down, things appear to float and perspective is disregarded entirely. Instead, Chagall chose to focus on colour, form and shape. The result is a very emotional work -- a visual diary of Marc Chagall's life.

Intentions

The important thing to note about this picture is that is a reflection of Marc Chagall's dreams and memories. Also relevant is the fact that many of Chagall's pictures, including this one, have symbols that relate specifically to Jewish folklore.
Visual Analysis Task 3

Max Ernst (1891-1976)

The Elephant Celebes, 1921,
Oil paint on canvas

The Elephant Celebes (or Celebes) is a 1921 painting by the German Dadaist and surrealist Max Ernst. It is among the most famous of Ernst's early surrealist works and "undoubtedly the first masterpiece of Surrealist painting in the De Chirico tradition." It combines the vivid, dreamlike atmosphere of Surrealism with the collage aspects of Dada.

Learning Task

Complete a full visual analysis of this image, including:

- Introduction and Subject Matter;
- Composition and other principles of design;
- Analysis using the elements of art;
- Judgement – how well does this image and the way it has been depicted relate to the underlying aims of Surrealism.

Research the image on the internet to get additional information to support your analysis.
Judgment

The final paragraph of a visual analysis requires you to make a judgement on the artist’s intentions and their success at conveying them. This means your view or opinions which must be stated clearly and show sound reasoning. To do this successfully your statements must be supported by researched information and an analytical argument. Evidence, examples and descriptive language needs to continue to be used to support your position.

All of the foregoing types of responses (description, analysis, interpretation) are necessary prerequisites to making informed judgments about the value of visual wonders including works of art. Judgments, however, do not exist in isolation; they are relative to a variety of criteria, which also need to be clarified. If one declares that a particular painting is an extraordinary masterpiece, what is the basis for this judgment? Is the work being compared to other works that are similar in style and/or theme? Or, does the work evoke such profound personal reactions that one is moved to call it great?

Consider the following questions;

1. What kind of personal response does the artwork invoke form you, the audience?
2. How well has the art work been produced?
3. How well as the artist captured the image or intention of his work?
4. Does the artwork successfully represent the aims of the artistic movement it is associated with?
5. How significant is this art work compared to other art works of the same period?
6. How significant is this art work compared to other artworks with the same intentions or imagery?

Making comparative judgments requires that one possess a background that is relative to what is being evaluated. For example, questioning whether a work is an ordinary or an extraordinary example of a particular artistic style requires some acquaintance with other works in the same style.

What qualities do you admire in the art work?

Learning Task.

As a class discuss and list the qualities you consider important when analysing and judging art works of the Surrealist movement.
Consider this writing on Rene Magritte’s artistic intentions:

"It is a union that suggests the essential mystery of the world. Art for me is not an end in itself, but a means of evoking that mystery.

— René Magritte on putting seemingly unrelated objects together in juxtaposition

Magritte's work frequently displays a collection of ordinary objects in an unusual context, giving new meanings to familiar things. The use of objects as other than what they seem is typified in his painting, The Treachery of Images (La trahison des images), which shows a pipe that looks as though it is a model for a tobacco store advertisement. Magritte painted below the pipe "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" ("This is not a pipe"), which seems a contradiction, but is actually true: the painting is not a pipe, it is an image of a pipe. It does not "satisfy emotionally"—when Magritte once was asked about this image, he replied that of course it was not a pipe, just try to fill it with tobacco. Magritte used the same approach in a painting of an apple: he painted the fruit and then used an internal caption or framing device to deny that the item was an apple. In these "Ceci n'est pas" works, Magritte points out that no matter how naturalistically we depict an object, we never do catch the item itself.

Among Magritte's works are a number of surrealist versions of other famous paintings. Elsewhere, Magritte challenges the difficulty of artwork to convey meaning with a recurring motif of an easel, as in his The Human Condition series (1933, 1935) or The Promenades of Euclid (1955) (wherein the spires of a castle are "painted" upon the ordinary streets which the canvas overlooks). In a letter to André Breton, he wrote of The Human Condition that it was irrelevant if the scene behind the easel differed from what was depicted upon it, "but the main thing was to eliminate the difference between a view seen from outside and from inside a room." The windows in some of these pictures are framed with heavy drapes, suggesting a theatrical motif.

Magritte's style of surrealism is more representational than the "automatic" style of artists such as Joan Miró. Magritte's use of ordinary objects in unfamiliar spaces is joined to his desire to create poetic imagery. He described the act of painting as "the art of putting colors side by side in such a way that their real aspect is effaced, so that familiar objects—the sky, people, trees, mountains, furniture, the stars, solid structures, graffiti—become united in a single poetically disciplined image. The poetry of this image dispenses with any symbolic significance, old or new."

René Magritte described his paintings as "visible images which conceal nothing; they evoke mystery and, indeed, when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question, 'What does that mean?'. It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable."

Magritte’s constant play with reality and illusion has been attributed to the early death of his mother. Psychoanalysts who have examined bereaved children have said that Magritte's back and forth play with reality and illusion reflects his "constant shifting back and forth from what he wishes—'mother is alive'—to what he knows—'mother is dead' ".

Image of pipe and passport of René Magritte
Salvador Dali (1904-1988)

Galatea of the Spheres, 1952, Oil paint on canvas

‘Galatea of the Spheres depicts Gala Dali, Salvador Dali’s wife and muse, as pieced together through a series of spheres. The name Galatea refers to a sea nymph of Classical mythology renowned for her virtue, and may also refer to the statue beloved by its creator, Pygmalion. Dalí had been interested in nuclear physics since the first atomic bomb explosions of August 1945. Recognizing that matter was made up of atoms which did not touch each other, he sought to replicate this in his art, with items suspended and not interacting with each other.’


Learning Task

Complete a full visual analysis of this image, including:

- Introduction and Subject Matter;
- Composition and other principles of design;
- Analysis using the elements of art;
- Interpretation and Artist’s intentions.
- Judgement – how well does this image and the way it has been depicted relate to the underlying aims of Surrealism.

Research the image on the internet to get additional information to support your analysis.