

Manet to Maya Lin

The Nevada Museum of Art is the largest provider of arts education in the State of Nevada. As such, one of our primary goals is to give Museum visitors the opportunity to see masterful artworks in an intimate setting and facilitate fluency in the language of art. *Manet to Maya Lin* presents artworks drawn from the collections of the Nevada Museum of Art, augmented by select loans from private collections. These include paintings by artists such as Vincent van Gogh, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Mark Rothko, among others. Visitors are encouraged to experiment with visual arts literacy tools known as close looking; recognizing technique; and discussion to develop a deeper connection to these extraordinary artworks.

We live in an increasingly visual world, where images are superseding words as our primary form of communication. The ability to interpret, negotiate and make meaning from images impacts our capacity to successfully navigate language, communication and critical human interaction. As one of the older forms of human communication, the language of art has always been a vital component for navigating our own visual literacy. In this light, constructing meaning from art becomes less an elite skill reserved for the halls of academia and more of an essential aptitude to succeed in a digital world.

Through personal engagements with both historically significant and experimental contemporary artists, we learn to look for details and recognize important artistic processes and techniques. Most importantly, we learn to actively construct meaning through conversation. *Manet to Maya Lin* has the power to show us the ways we create meaning from art: By walking through the galleries and experiencing the works of art on display, we open ourselves to the possibilities of a visually literate society.

Close Looking

The first and most important skill necessary for building understanding of a work of art is looking. Not just a casual glance as we pass by an artwork, but close looking. This starts with slowing down to engage thoughtfully, explore, and analyze visual cues to discover the deeper and often hidden meanings in art.

We challenge you to ask yourself the types of questions that encourage close looking and careful consideration:

What are you looking at?

What do you see?

What might be happening?

Is there a narrative? What story is being told?

Are your observations personal? What might others see that you do not?

Dig a little deeper, what more can you find?

Recognizing Technique

Consideration of how an artist creates allows us to better comprehend the significance of his or her contributions today. Analysis of the techniques and methods employed by artists and the context of the artist's life experience help to highlight what makes individual works significant. Recognizing the techniques an artist uses relies on an understanding of the elements and principles of art. Context, however, is a much richer investigation into the historical, cultural and personal realities of the time and place in which an artist pursues creative investigations and experimentation. By studying individual artworks, we can begin to see what differentiates practice and process.

Art historians, curators, and anyone interested in the style and context in which artwork was produced might ask these questions:

How is the artist using color to impact the message of the work? Are there bright and contrasting colors or soft and blended tones? How is the artist using color to communicate light, shadow and emotion?

The mechanics of perspective are what give an image depth and dimension. Whether you are looking at a two-dimensional image or a three-dimensional form, consider the focal point. Where does your eye naturally land? What point of view is the artist creating? Is the artist warping or altering the perspective presented?

Does the artwork represent a specific style or art historical movement? How does the artwork imitate or break away from art-making traditions?

Discussion

Understanding is built through conversation. Discussion among friends and peers encourages thoughtful and rigorous examination of what we see. The expression of our internal ideas and feelings further contributes to the active construction of knowledge and meaning. We learn far more about what we believe and become increasingly articulate through the process of discussing works of art. If visual literacy comes from interpreting the message embedded in the language of art, the verbalization of that thought process is likely the most important aspect of our personal growth and experience with art.

Consider asking some of these questions while looking at the artworks on view:

How are recognizable symbols and images being used?

What do you think about what you see? Why?

Why do you think the artist made this work? Apply deductive reasoning, provide examples of visual evidence from the image to support your ideas.

How is your perception of the work impacted by culture and society? How might people from other communities respond to this artwork?