

Western Washington University

From the Selected Works of Javier Berzal de Dios

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Visual Analysis

Javier Berzal de Dios, *Western Washington University*



Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/berzal/15/>

Step 1: Identification

In this step, we focus on factual data

- Title
- Last name of the artist
- Medium (e.g. fresco painting, bronze sculpture)
- Location
- Artistic movement (e.g. Italian baroque, impressionism)

Step 2: Composition

Here is where you develop analytic observation skills. Note that our emotions about a piece are not present—we want to favor an objective analysis.

- Line: Can you see the outline of the figures?
 - Color: Which colors predominate? Bright or subdued?
 - Brushwork: Can you see individual brushstrokes (painterly)?
 - Light: Contrast of light/dark? What/where is the source? Spotlight effect?
 - Space: Interior or exterior? Shallow or deep? Is perspective used?
 - Texture: Coarse or soft? Note: texture is especially important in sculpture.
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- Focus: Is there a focal point of the composition?
 - Movement: Motion or “freeze-frame” effect?
 - Balance: symmetrical or asymmetrical?
 - Proportion: Is something logically too large or small?
 - Unity: Is there uniformity? Wholeness?

Step 3: Content or Subject Matter

In this step we aim at consolidating the individual aspects that we have observed in step 2 to begin creating a narrative of the artwork. Important question here include:

- What is the artwork about? Is there a story you can “read”?
- Does the composition aid the content?
- Does the artist represent the scene accurately or she taking liberties?

Step 4: Context

This step integrates the compositional and the content within a historical moment in time. Remember, artworks do not exist in a bubble outside of time and space.

- How does the composition and content exemplify when/where it was created?
- How does the historical context affect the composition and the content?
- What are the historical circumstances in which the artwork was created?
- What was the function and purpose of the artwork?
- Where was it first shown?