



**TITLE:** INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORKS

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# Interpretive Frameworks

Art dating from 1970 is considered to mark a shift in art practice and theory away from the emphasis of modern art on originality and uniqueness, towards a more self-critical and diverse series of approaches which have come to be known as Postmodern.

Postmodern art represents the expression of our own culture and so offers contemporary relevance and accessibility together with the topicality and currency of local artists and issues.

Interpretive frameworks are methods that are used to interpret aspects of an artwork. The framework of formal interpretation is used to analyse how an artwork's formal elements contribute to its meanings and messages, while the framework of symbolism helps viewers to appreciate how artworks can also refer to general and/or abstract ideas as part of their meaning. The historical context framework can be used to identify the influence on an artwork of the time and place in which it was made. The framework of psychoanalysis can be used to shed light on how artworks can also reflect an artist's more personal feelings and life circumstances. Other frameworks can be used to interpret how artworks comment on political issues, cultural issues, gender issues and Postmodernist perspectives. Viewed together, these frameworks help viewers to appreciate how an artwork contains many different aspects of meaning – from the formal to the political, and from the historical to the cultural.

## **Formal interpretation, including:**

- Visual analysis: the formal elements of an artwork, such as line, shape, texture, colour, movement, surface composition and the depiction of space, modelling and tonal structure in an artwork;
- Style: the stylistic qualities of an artwork and the ways in which these qualities relate to other artworks;
- Technique: the technical skills and approaches used by artists working in a particular medium to achieve a specific effect; for example, techniques of printmaking;
- How formal, stylistic and technical elements contribute to the meanings and messages of an artwork.

## **Additional interpretive frameworks:**

### **Cultural:**

- The ways in which artworks can be interpreted in terms of cultural issues; for example, their influence on the work of Frida Kahlo and other Mexican Modernist artists, or the influence of Buddhism on the arts of Asia;
- How artworks from different cultures interpret ideas, beliefs and/or themes in ways that reflect different cultural perspectives and/or understandings of cultural identity; • how cultural ideas, beliefs and/or themes contribute to the meanings and messages of artworks.

### **Gender:**

- The ways in which artworks can be interpreted in terms of issues of gender and/or sexuality; for example, the issue of the influence of gender and/or sexuality on the work of Baroque or Postmodern artists (such as Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Leyster, Keith Haring), feminist art and criticism, or male representations of female beauty in the Japanese 'Floating World' print;
- How gender issues contribute to the meanings and messages of artworks.

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## **Historical context:**

- The social, political and/or religious contexts of an artwork; for example, the influence of the rise of Nazism on the work of the German Expressionists, the significance of religious and historical factors in European Renaissance artworks, the rise of new media and the challenges to traditional art practices in late twentieth century – early twenty-first century Australian and international art, or the Silk Road and the transmission of cultural influence across Asia;
- How social, political and/or religious factors contribute to the meanings and messages of artworks.

## **Political:**

- The ways in which artworks can be interpreted in terms of political issues, such as class, power, colonialism, race, environmental issues (for example, land-rights, social equity and other political issues in urban and traditional Aboriginal art), the representation of non-aristocratic social groupings in eighteenth century English art, postcolonial interpretations of Gauguin and other nineteenth and twentieth century representations of the ‘noble savage’, documentary photography and politics (for example, Sebastião Salgado, Walker Evans, Mario Merz, Giulio Paolini and the Arte Povera group), Environmental art (for example, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Robert Smithson, Walter De Maria, Richard Long), the work of dissident Chinese artists since the Cultural Revolution, or art and the Russian Revolution;
- How political issues contribute to the meanings and messages of artworks.

## **Postmodernism:**

- The ways in which artworks can be interpreted in terms of Postmodernism;
- The ways in which artists use parody, irony, satire, quotation, appropriation and/or non-traditional art practices and art forms in order to question and challenge traditional understandings of art and its significance; for example, the ways in which artistic collaboration in performance, installation and conceptual art can be seen as challenging traditional ideals of artistic ‘genius’ and individuality, the ways in which recent digital and online art can be seen as challenging traditional ideals of the importance of viewing and experiencing object-based art in museums and galleries, or globalisation and the issue of cultural integrity in Asian art practice and theory;
- How Postmodernist perspectives contribute to the meanings and messages of artworks.

## **Psychoanalysis:**

- The ways in which artworks can be interpreted in terms of an artist’s personal experiences and preoccupations; for example, the influence of early family relationships on the work of an artist or the influence of dreams, traumas and/or the inner worlds of the subconscious in the work of an artist;
- How psychoanalysis contributes to the meanings and messages of artworks.

## **Symbolism:**

- General and/or abstract ideas and principles referred to by the use of symbols in artworks; for example, the skull as a symbol of death, the trident in Hindu art as symbolic of past, present and future and the God Siva’s threefold character as creator, preserver and destroyer, rarrk (crosshatching), Islamic art and/or the place of the Mosque, motifs used in Australian indigenous art to evoke music and aspects of sacred ritual, or any personal symbol created by an artist;
- How symbols contribute to the meanings and messages of artworks.