A Guide for Understanding the Exhibition

Gallery at Tempe Center for the Arts
700 W. Rio Salado Parkway
Tempe, AZ 85281
480-350-2867

tempecenterforthearts.com/Gallery
Dear New Reader:

We hope this guide will provide you with some easy-to-use tools to enhance your experiences with visual art. Over the years, we’ve noticed that people can be both attracted to and intimidated by art at the same time. We’ve found that asking questions that start “informal conversations” is one of the best ways to put people at ease.

Sure, some art is beautiful and easy to approach, while other art can be challenging and not so easy to digest. Just like a book, visual art can be appealing, serious and yes, even ugly. Some art confirms, celebrates and expands how we understand ourselves. Other art opens pathways through which we can explore other viewpoints. You as a viewer (reader) also bring a variety of thoughts and personal preferences into the experience. With practice and some new tools on your belt, you’ll find that those seemingly complicated layers of meaning and context can be peeled back and explored. It’s just knowing where to look and why.

We would also like to thank the artists for letting us utilize some of their artworks for this guide.

Sincerely,

Mary Erickson, Ph.D. (TCA Docent) & Michelle Nichols Dock (Visual Arts Curator)

Myths, Maps and Legends:
Sept 13, 2019 – Jan 4, 2020

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all art and science.”

Albert Einstein, (From Living Philosophies, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1931)

Today, our modern world is filled with easy access to vast amounts of data information and new technologies designed to make life a little easier. Resources like the internet, GPS navigation, smart phones and digital streaming services are undeniably cool and useful. People can access trivia answers, find a location or watch a movie at the touch of a button.

In the past, just like now, humans have always been inventive and creative problem solvers. Centuries before Google Maps, old world cartographers helped ships cross the seas by using the sun, moon and star constellations to travel to faraway lands. Some of the early maps also included threatening illustrations of sea monsters and foreboding inscriptions like “here be dragons” to warn sailors of possible danger. Like a map, explaining the unknown in a memorable way is also what a good storyteller does best. Countless generations of people across many different cultures have, and still do, enjoy gathering around a fire to listen and learn from elders, poets and bards about heroes like Beowulf and local legends like the Lost Dutchman’s Gold.

Today, this group of contemporary artists follow in the footsteps of those ancient map makers and storytellers by creating visual narratives that tell of their own journeys to find answers and make sense of the world around us.
Inquiry Strategy with Tactical Questions

The following 4-question strategy is an easy to use tool for investigating the layers of context and meaning in visual art.

**What Can I See?** Facts about the artwork.
- Subject Matter
- Design Elements & Principles
- Technical Features
- Function
- Reproduction versus Original
- Care/Condition

**What Else Can I Learn?** Contextual facts.
- Artists’ Lives
- Physical Environments
- Cultural Context
- Artworlds (Art Experience)

**What Does It Mean?**
Conclusions about meanings.
- Personal & Cultural Viewpoints
- Artists’ Intentions
- Art Specialists’ Understandings

**How Does It Compare?**
Conclusions about connections among artworks.
- Style
- Art Influence (From Other Art)
- Themes

The Inquiry Strategy with Tactical Questions was developed for the Gallery at Tempe Center for the Arts in 2007. It is a revision of prior research by Mary Erickson, Ph.D.
Hints for Asking Good Questions
Hints for a well-rounded conversation: You’ll often learn more from open-ended questions than close-ended questions.

A **closed-ended question** is answered with a one-word response such as yes or no or another single word. *Example: Is this an oil or acrylic painting?*

*Closed-ended questions* start with verbs like “Is? Do? and Can?”

An **open-ended question** requires more explanation.  
*Example: How is painting in oil different from painting with acrylics?*  
*Open-ended questions* start with “Why? and How?”

Some words can be used for **both types of questions** such as:  
What? Who? Where? When?

Both open and close-ended questions are valuable. The construction and phrasing of a question shapes the kind of information you can expect to receive.

**For Practice:** Write down 3 open-ended questions. Pretend you are meeting someone for the first time. You need to ask questions to get to know that person better.

a.  
b.  
c.

Many of the activities are based on processes outlined by D. Rothstein and L. Santana in *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask their Own Questions* (2014) published in Cambridge, MA by Harvard University Press.
What Can I See?
Tips for looking carefully at an Artwork

Subject Matter: Some artworks have subject matter and others do not. Subject matter refers to anything real or imaginary that is shown in an artwork (such as people, places and things).

Elements of Design: Traditional elements in Western art include: (“D” represents “dimensional.”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2D Elements</th>
<th>3D Elements</th>
<th>4D Elements/Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>line</td>
<td>form or mass</td>
<td>sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shape</td>
<td>space</td>
<td>duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>value (light and dark)</td>
<td>texture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>color</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Design Principles: Ways artists organize elements of design to create interesting and unified compositions. Some Traditional Principles include:

- Balance
- Harmony
- Emphasis/Focal Point
- Contrast
- Variation
- Repetition
- Rhythm
- Focal Point
- Movement
- Direction
- Pattern
- Transition
- Proportion

Technical Features: Careful viewing of an artwork usually reveals evidence of how it was made. (Indicators might include art making tools, materials and processes.)

Function: Artists make artworks that serve a great many functions such as:

- Capturing the beauty of nature
- Memorializing an important event
- Celebrating or criticizing a person, event or group
- Exploring visual possibilities
- Sharing a vision
- Promoting a belief or cause
- Celebrating the artist's heritage
- Making the ordinary extraordinary
- Stimulating action
- Many more
What Can I See?
Practice looking carefully at an Artwork

Reproduction Vs Original: Some reproductions can look pretty different from the originals. Common differences between originals and reproductions are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Colors</th>
<th>Surface Texture</th>
<th>Luminosity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angle of View</td>
<td>Lighting</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Care/Condition: The condition of artworks can deteriorate over time for many reasons, among them:

- Perishable or fragile materials
- Matting, mounting, or framing
- Accidents
- Damage in storage
- Temperature and humidity
- Vandalism

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “what you see.”

1. Which of the clusters of tall, rectangular blocks are shown from a bird’s eye view, (directly above)? Which are shown at an angle so you can see some of the sides, not just the tops? What do you see in between the clusters of rectangles? [SUBJECT MATTER]

2. Based just on this image reproduction (left), how large do you imagine the original painting is? Now, in person (if you can), how does it compare with your guess? [REPRODUCTION VS ORIGINAL]

3. Which parts of the painting do you think were digitally manipulated? Which parts do you think were hand painted? How can you tell? [TECHNIQUE]

4. Does Wander Around #12 have one strong focal point or several focal points spread around the painting? Where? [DESIGN]

Xinyu Zhang, (details) Wander Around #12, mixed media acrylic and digital, original is 100" x 56"
Now You Try! *What Can I See?*

![Image of artwork](image)

Look at this next piece by Zhang. List 3 quick descriptions about what you see: (Example: “large sculpture, depicts a woman and is made of bronze.”)

a

b

c

Now, based on your observations, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork.

a

b

c
What Can I Learn?
Tips for investigating an Artist’s Background

**Artist's Life:** The personal lives of artists can affect their work, including such factors as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Travel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal life experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Physical Environment:** The physical world, both natural and human made, can inspire their work:

- Natural environment (plants, animals, climate, landforms, etc.)
- Constructed environment (buildings, roads, bridges, vehicles, furniture, consumer goods, etc.)

**Culture:** Artists can draw ideas for their work from their cultures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values and beliefs</th>
<th>Hobbies and entertainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Economic situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Heritage and/or ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Art Experience (Artworld):** Artists get ideas and support from other people involved in art, through:

- Art education/Apprenticeships
- Insights from specialists in the art form (ceramics, painting, etc.)
- Representation by art galleries
- Contact with art patrons and collectors
- Acknowledgement through art awards, prizes, grants, commissions.
- Art included in museum collections
What Can I Learn?
Practice investigating an Artist’s Background

Yabuki was born and raised in Fukushima, Japan. After graduating from Women’s Art College in Tokyo, she began her visual arts career as a graphic designer. After moving to the United States in the mid-1990s she decided to focus on developing a fine arts career. She’s spent more than two decades working in the Phoenix art scene and has shown her work in various venues including coffee shops, salons, tattoo parlors, tattoo conventions and galleries. She’s shown in local Valley art spaces such as Modified, Legend City, Ice House and Scottsdale Public Library Gallery. Today, she lives in Tempe and maintains a full-time studio space in the Grand Avenue arts district in Phoenix.

She describes her life in the US as an adventure with challenges like learning a new language and adapting to a new culture. She explains “So many detours may seem like a waste of time to many people’s eyes, but everything I have experienced up until now has made my art what it is and given it the depth that it deserves. I truly appreciate everyone who has touched my life.”

Yabuki’s influences include traditional and contemporary Japanese imagery, European art history, fashion and American popular culture and fine art. Her background in graphic design and tattooing also inspire the overall look and storytelling quality of her works. She refers to her art as “hybrid mythology” that is guided by both eastern and western cultures. The work in this exhibition is from an ongoing series of large-scale paintings which focus on the harmony of nature and an appeal for balance. The motivation behind the first pieces in the series, Phoenix Rising (Destroy and Resurrect), 2008, was based on negative people and experiences that Yabuki was striving to rise above. She’s continued to focus on optimism by expanding the series to include pieces like Unicorn Garden and most recently, Misty Air Dragon. Yabuki intends to continue the series which features symbols of nature and positive energy.

yukoyabuki.com

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “what I can learn.”

1. What are some of the different locations and cultural experiences that inform and enrich Yabuki’s art? [PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT]

2. Besides graphic design, what other artistic references does Yabuki draw upon in her art? [ART EXPERIENCE]

3. Have you ever moved from one culture (city, state, community) to another, or known someone who has? How does Yabuki make the most of her experiences? [ARTIST'S LIFE]
Now You Try! What Else I Can Learn?

Yuko Yabuki, *Misty Air Dragon*, acrylic and silver leaf on canvas, 72” x 216”

**Brainstorm and list 5 interesting facts about Yuko Yabuki’s background.**
*You may want to consult pg. 9 and/or a media article and/or Internet references about the artist.)*

a

b

c

d

e

Now, based on your research, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about these artworks/artist.

a

b

c
What Does It Mean?
Tips for interpreting an Artwork

**Artist's Intention:** Artists decide how they want their artworks to look. Their intentions may be:

- Personal or private
- Unconventional
- Experimental
- Focused on collector, patron, funder or other viewer
- Traditional
- Evolving
- Deliberate
- Other
- Practical
- Emotional
- Boundary breaking
- Spontaneous

**Art Specialists' Understandings:** The considered opinions of art specialists (experts) direct viewers' attention to aspects of artworks that they judge to be worthy of that attention. Art specialists may include:

- Artists
- Art Historians
- Tribal elders
- Art Teachers
- Master Craftspeople
- Others
- Museum Curators
- Ceremonial Leaders
- Art Critics
- Guild Members

**Cultural Understandings:** A viewer's cultural understanding draws upon a set of ideas, beliefs and standards shared broadly within a culture. These are learned, not by special effort and instruction, but simply through growing up as a member of a culture. Unexamined expectations might include:

- High price
- Familiar
- Obvious meaning
- Other
- Difficult to make
- Easily recognizable

**Your Own Viewpoint:** Your responses to artworks are affected by:

- conscious thoughts
- careful viewing
- free association
- unconscious reactions
- thoughtful reflection
- previous art experience
- personal preferences
- relevant information
- and more
What Does It Mean?  
Practice interpreting an Artwork

Daniel Martin Diaz, Regina, solarplate etching, 15” x 11”  
Created in the Mesa Arts Center studios in 2005. On loan  
courtesy of Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “what it means.”

1. What do you think Diaz is trying to express in Regina? What might some of the images inside the work mean—like the insect body, queen’s head, eyes and the Latin phrases like “sanctus deus” [holy God] and “Blatta Regina” [blatta may refer to purple, moth or cockroach and Regina is queen]?  
[ARTIST’S INTENTION]

2. How do suppose some knowledge of Catholicism and Latin American Culture might be helpful in interpreting Regina? Explain.  
[CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING]

3. Refer to the LA Times description of Diaz’s work as “broodingly personal [with] ...a compelling, esoteric edge.” Do you see Regina as moody or edgy? How so? [ART SPECIALIST’S UNDERSTANDING]

Daniel Martin Diaz is an artist and musician based in Tucson. His work has been exhibited worldwide and commented upon in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and other publications. He has also designed art for public spaces, such as Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix, and is an award-winning designer of record album covers.

Diaz writes “One of my earliest memories as a child was the way death and religion played an important role in my family’s life. My parents were born in Mexico with traditional beliefs, and their beliefs made their way into my subconscious. The fact that many of those beliefs seemed to render no logical explanation has also influenced me. These unanswered questions find a home in my work, which evokes the mystery, fear and irony of those vivid memories of my past.”

The Los Angeles Times has written that Daniel Martin Diaz “...is broodingly personal [with] ...a compelling, esoteric edge.” In a press release from La Luz de Jesus Gallery in Los Angeles, Teresa Rodriguez writes “Known for his thought-provoking artwork that transports onlookers to secret places and entices them to question their own reality, Daniel Martin Díaz [longs] to create a series of images that encourage viewers to get involved in the mysteries of fate, science, and the unknown.”

In a Los Angeles Times interview Diaz says “Art is a reflection of ourselves, the story of humanity, and a quest to understand the physical and metaphysical world. As we try to understand our place in the universe, art can be an important part of the dialogue we can create and share with each other. In my work, I seek to reveal the mysterious with arcane imagery and techniques that make sense to me on a deep level that words cannot quantify.”

danielmartindiaz.com
Now You Try! What Does It Mean?

Look at this work by Daniel Martin Diaz. Brainstorm and list 5 ideas about what the artwork is about.

a  

b  

c  

d  

e  

Now, based on your interpretation, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about this artwork.

a  

b  

c  

Daniel Martin Diaz
Cor
solarplate etching, 15” x 11”
Created in the Mesa Arts Center studios in 2005.
On loan courtesy of Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum
How Do They Compare?
Tips for gathering insights by comparing Artworks

**Style:** Style is a set of distinctive qualities ("family resemblance") that are shared by more than one artwork. Artists develop their own style and incorporate aspects of the styles of artists from their own or other times and cultures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist's style</th>
<th>Style of art movement or period</th>
<th>Cultural style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Art Influence:** Most artists are influenced by artists who worked before them, though some self-taught artists, called “outsider artists,” work in isolation, largely unaware of the work of other artists. Art influences can include:

- Technical and aesthetic achievements by other artists
- Other artists' ideas, innovations, commitments
- Traditional or historical art ideas to follow, extend or break away from

**Theme:** Some broad, cross-cultural themes have been the focus of many artists throughout history and across the globe:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People and nature</th>
<th>Cultural pride</th>
<th>Conquest</th>
<th>Overcoming obstacles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strength of family</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Social order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Chaos</td>
<td>Revisiting history</td>
<td>Heroic adventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious devotion</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Many more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Do They Compare?
Practice gathering insights by comparing prints by Kathryn Maxwell

Maxwell is originally from Illinois. She lived throughout the Midwest and Alabama before moving to Tempe. She earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin in Madison and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Today, she is Associate Dean for Student Success in the Arizona State University Herberger Institute for Design and Arts and Professor in the School of Art where she teaches printmaking.

In an interview for Voyage Phoenix Maxwell explains that she has been “profoundly influenced by journeys across the globe, from India and Bhutan to Peru and Easter Island, I recognize the similarities of a sense of purpose and a desire for beauty. Through my journeys and artwork, I hope to connect to others and provide them a sense of wonder and connection to the wider universe.” Maxwell seeks opportunities to travel and has been awarded artist residencies in China, Belgium, Greece, Scotland, and the U.S.

Maxwell states that “Travel has highly inspired my work—the various cultures, differences of viewing the universe and humans’ place in that universe, as well as many of the indigenous arts and crafts, both secular and religious. I read a lot of science books and articles (DNA, astronomy, some physics and cartography) to inform my work. And, yes, I love looking at old maps!”

Sample Questions: See below how an easy conversation about an art piece can begin just by asking and answering questions about “how they compare.”

1. How are both El Ojo de la Noche #1 and Celestial Split similar in style (for example, color, light and dark, line and use of media). [STYLE]

2. What in Maxwell’s work looks as if it might have been influence by historical astronomical or scientific drawings? [ART/VISUAL INFLUENCE]

3. How do Maxwell’s works reflect the theme of the Myths, Maps, & Legends exhibition? (see page 2) [THEME]
Now You Try! How Do They Compare?

1. How is *El Ojo de la Noche #2* different from *El Ojo de la Noche #1* as seen on p. 15?

2. How is *El Ojo de la Noche #2* similar to *Celestial Split* on p. 15?

Now, based on your comparisons, write three questions you could ask a friend about Maxwell’s artwork.

a

b

c
Follow Up Activity: My Place in the World

OBJECTIVES (Sixth-grade performance objectives follow each object. The activity can be adapted for students of any age.)

1. Students will be able to illustrate a story that is personally meaningful.
   (VA.CR.1.6b: Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating)
2. Students will be able to experiment with a new medium or new use of a familiar medium.
   (VA.CR.2.6a: Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods and approaches)

ACTIVITIES

Define a myth or a legend is a traditional story passed down from the past that explains a mystery. Ask students to list several legends or myths that they find meaningful. For example, they might remember a children’s story, a family legend, a mythical movie, a good book or favorite TV show. Next, form students into small groups and ask them to briefly share one legend or myth and explain why they find it especially meaningful. For example, a story might be meaningful because it helps us understand something mysterious; or because it helps us feel connected to other people, places or times; or because it helps us think about our own place in the world.

Preview “Fee and the Meadow People” from Stories of Art and decide whether to use it with your students. “Fee” is a story about a clever girl who was honored in a ceremony as an elder repeated the legend of how, long ago, her people came to live in their meadow. The student artworks on this page were inspired by that story.

http://www.maryericksonventures.com/june282015/theme_1.pdf

Ask your students to look again at the artworks in the guide. Lead a discussion about how these artworks might show us or help us imagine a myth or legend.

ASSIGNMENT

Make an artwork that shows a myth or legend that is meaningful to you.

Try out a medium you’ve not used before or use a familiar process in a new way.

Chalk on torn, black construction paper by sixth grade student studying under art teacher Lorna Corlett.

Computer graphic image by high school student studying with art teacher Karla Primosch