A Guide for Understanding the Exhibition

The Gallery at Tempe Center for the Arts
700 W. Rio Salado Parkway
Tempe, AZ 85281
The word “retro” describes things like clothes, cars and music that reflect styles and design elements from the past. Artists are often asked, *where do you get your ideas?* While the creative spark is different for every individual, this exhibition explores the inspirations and art making processes of ten Arizona-based artists.

Through personal retrospection, these artists give us a glimpse into how they individually absorb, filter and react to art and ideas from the past.

**For Educators:** The Gallery at TCA offers a wide variety of FREE educational resources including admission, tours, artist workshops and online curriculum. Learn more at: tempecenterforthearts.com/TCAGallery

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**Dear 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 Retro Reaction 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)*
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What?</th>
<th>Who?</th>
<th>Where?</th>
<th>When?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>Variation</th>
<th>Focal Point</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis/Focal Point</td>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>Proportion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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. What details indicate that the orange figure is a fish? What animal is riding the fish? What is he doing? [SUBJECT MATTER]

2. Where is the clay flattened into thin sheets? How do you imagine the fish's scales were forms? [TECHNIQUE]

3. Kazuma Sambe repeated elements to create many patterns on this sculpture. Where do you see: repeated wavy edges, radiating ridges, c-shaped curls and parallel ridges? [DESIGN]

4. Ceramics has a long tradition of being made into useful objects like cups and bowls. Imagine the best setting for this artwork? A museum? A cultural center? A restaurant? A home? Now, what function could this piece serve in each possible location? Explain [FUNCTION].

Kazuma Sambe, *Extravagant Flavor, Secret Recipe II*, ceramic and mixed media wall piece
Now You Try! *What Can I See?*

Look at this next piece by Sambe 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>Other</td>
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</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>
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</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**

Rembrandt Quiballo was born in the city of Manila in the Philippines. The People Power Revolution led to social and political unrest there, compelling his family to leave the country. For a brief period of time, as a young child, Quiballo lived in two of the most socially and politically divergent countries in the world, Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands. His family would eventually immigrate to the United States in search of greater opportunity and better education.

He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting and a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy from the University of Arizona and a Master of Fine Arts degree in photography from Arizona State University. His works have been exhibited nationally and internationally in cities such as Albuquerque, Chicago, New York City, Cairo, Egypt and Berlin, Germany.

Quiballo’s work currently explores the use of the moving image and mass media and its effects on social and political history. Many of his artistic influences include modern and contemporary artists interested in shifting perceptions of social and popular culture. One of Quiballo favorite works of art is a piece by American artist Nancy Burson titled *Warhead I* (1982) which digitally blends Cold War era leaders’ faces into a single digital portrait. Quiballo especially likes how she utilized science, mathematics and facial recognition software to morph together these leaders’ faces based on the number of nuclear warheads each country possessed at the time: Ronald Reagan/USA (55%), Leonid Brezhnev/Soviet Union (45%), Margaret Thatcher/UK (less than 1%), François Mitterand/France (less than 1%) and Deng Xiaoping/China (less than 1%).

See Nancy Burson artwork at: www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/266955

Quiballo has lived in diverse physical environments from his early childhood was in tropical Manila, to the temperate Netherlands, to the very different deserts of Saudi Arabia and Arizona. However, wherever he has lived, he has found himself surrounded by mass media and the "overwhelming effect of visual images we are bombarded with on a daily basis."

**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. Where has Rembrandt Quiballo experienced life in a monarchy and in a democracy? Where has he encountered revolutionary upheaval and capitalism? [LIFE & CULTURE]

2. Quiballo has earned degrees in both painting and photography. What features of his current work seem to draw on each of these art areas? [ART EXPERIENCE]

3. What unescapable social phenomenon has Quiballo experienced across the globe? [ENVIRONMENT]
Brainstorm and list 5 interesting facts about Rembrandt Quiballo’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 this artwork/artist.

Rembrandt Quiballo, *Pop Artifact*, digital print

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

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

**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
- Obvious meaning
- Difficult to make
- Easily recognizable
- Familiar
- Other

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

- Conscious thoughts
- Unconscious reactions
- Personal preferences
- Careful viewing
- Thoughtful reflection
- Relevant information
- Free association
- Previous art experience
- And more
What Does It Mean? 
Practice interpreting an Artwork

Fausto Fernandez grew up along the border of Mexico and the US (Juarez, Mexico and El Paso TX.). His work explores how individuals within society communicate and express themselves not limited by their cultural environment.

Writing about his work in the Retro Reaction exhibition, Fernandez states “I use wallpaper and instructional materials such as architectural drawings and maps. I consider instructions as metaphors to rituals in society that provide us direction in our lives. .... I borrow from the art of the past [including pop art and abstract expressionism]. Pop artists consistently look for mundane objects and ... present them in a different way. .... [Abstract expressionists] paintings consist of ‘action and gesture’ resulting in an emotional and painterly display.”

Michelle Nichols Dock, curator of Retro Reaction writes “One of the things I find interesting about Fausto’s current series is a mixing of the old and the new. His painting style includes elements of expressionistic brush strokes, abstracted forms, mixed media collage and a few pop art-like graphics here and there. His piece, ‘Quetzalcoatl’ takes on layers of possible meanings, especially because the title is so important. Fausto depicts a recognizable black and white American space shuttle launching a satellite off into the darkness- filling the void with colorful shapes and patterns. Another curator once referred to Fausto’s use of florals and bright colors as symbols of the colorful vitality of Mexico. The title, ‘Quetzalcoatl’, certainly refers to the ancient Aztec god of the earth and sky, who was also known as a patron of knowledge, religion and the arts. But Fausto leaves the door open for possible interpretations. I’m still pondering the work and its overall meaning.”

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 Fernandez was trying to do when he applied paint on top of the wallpaper and diagrams in Quetzalcoatl? [ARTIST’S INTENTION]

2. How do the curator’s comments affect how you perceive and make sense of Quetzalcoatl? [ART SPECIALIST’S UNDERSTANDING]

3. How might viewers’ diverse interests, experiences, ages and cultural backgrounds affect interpretation of Quetzalcoatl? [CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING]
Now You Try! What Does It Mean?

Look at this work by Fausto Fernandez. 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
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 Fashion Designs by Angela Johnson

Angela Johnson is an Arizona clothing designer committed to eco-friendly fashion. She states that she “gravitates towards graphics that are corny and even shocking and provocative.” Her influences include the work of other artists and designers who use pop culture and campy images. Among her influences is the work of the famous pop artist, Andy Warhol, who brought attention to everyday products by using marketing images in his art.

Johnson describes her garments as “eco-friendly, unique, comfortable, washable, versatile and fun.” She writes that her “dresses and sport coats/blazers ... are one-of-a-kind creations because they are each made with different recycled t-shirts.” She uses the fabric of 25 or more t-shirts to create each finished gown, “incorporating highly tailored shaping details such as darts and boning” for which the t-shirts were never engineered. She writes “there is beauty in the transformation from utilitarian tee to girlie confection: a resourceful frivolity.”

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. What characteristics (fabric, design, color, garment structure, etc.) do you see in more than one of Johnson’s creations? How would you describe her style? [STYLE]

2. How has pop culture and/or pop art influenced Johnson’s work? [ART INFLUENCE]

3. How do Johnson’s fashion designs reflect the theme of the Retro Reaction exhibition? [THEME]
Now You Try! **How Do They Compare?**

List 3 highlights (your favorite visual features and/or information) about the gown.

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

**Now, compare these highlights with other pieces by Johnson (pg. 15).**
List 2 similarities among the artworks:

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

List 2 differences among the artworks:

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

**Now, based on your comparisons, write 3 questions you could ask a friend about these fashion designs.**

a

b

c
Follow Up Activity: *Something Old, Something New*

**OBJECTIVES**

Students will be able to develop and support an interpretation of an artwork. *(VA.RE.8.HS1: Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts)*

Students will be able to effectively combine deliberate collage processes with spontaneous painting processes. *(VA.CR2.HS1a: Engage in making works of art or design both spontaneously and deliberately)*

**VIEWING ACTIVITY:** Divide students into groups. Assign one *Retro Reaction* artist in this guide to each small group. With larger classes, several groups can focus on each artist. Ask each group to read about the artist and analyze how and why the artist created something new by taking old things and ideas a part and reassembling them. Ask each group to collaborate on writing a short interpretive paragraph about a specific artwork by the artist. Ask them to use their conclusions about the artist to interpret how and why the artwork is both “something old and something new.”

**MAKING ACTIVITY:** The artists in the exhibition sometimes look and react to art and ideas from the past to find inspiration. Like the *Retro Reaction* artists, students will be seeking ideas and inspiration for their own art making by looking at work by Fausto Fernandez.

Direct students’ attention towards Fernandez’s process of cutting apart and reassembled various types of paper (wallpaper, diagrams, maps) to make mixed media paintings. As students cut paper, they should carefully organize and reorganize the pieces in various ways before gluing. They may also wish to experiment with paint application before and after collaging.

Remind students that even though the *Retro Reaction* artists were inspired by other art and ideas, the artworks they create are unique and reflect their own interests, concerns and styles. As an example, just because Angela Johnson likes Andy Warhol, doesn’t mean her fashion designs look just like his work. For this activity, students should look to their own interests and concerns for themes, while still being influenced by Fernandez’s unique way of collaging together imagery and repurposed materials that would have otherwise been discarded into a landfill.

Distribute scissors, construction paper, glue sticks, tempera or acrylic paint and brushes. Ask students to bring or provide a variety of magazines or printouts from the Internet to be cut up.