**Critical Visual Methodology**

This is a framework you may find useful for thinking about images – things like illustrations, collages, photographs, prints or paintings. It’s based on the work of Gillian Rose, whose book *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction* is now in its 4th edition. The book is available in the UAL Library.

Rose (2016) suggests a four staged approach to analysing artworks and images. She describes these four stages as four sites; the site of production, the site of the image, the site of circulation and the site of audiencing. It may initially be confusing to think about these ‘sites’ so here is a table to explain what you should think about in each of the four stages of analysis.

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| --- | --- |
| **Site of Production** | Where an image is made; who made it; how it is made |
| **Site of the Image** | Its visual content and composition |
| **Site of Circulation** | Where and how the image travels over time and space |
| **Site of Audiencing** | Where and how the image is encountered by its spectators or users. |

When you use this methodology, take time to sit with your image. You should spend at least five minutes thinking through each stage or site. We call this slow looking. If you take your time you should start to surface responses you would normally miss in our fast paced world.

Rose also suggests that there are three modalities within each ‘site’: social, compositionality and technological. In each stage of your analysis it may be interesting to structure your thinking in terms of the technologies used to make, circulate or display the image, how the composition or content of the image impacts the viewer, or the social context in which the image was made or viewed. Again, this may sound confusing, so here is a table to help you understand what you might usefully explore under each modality.

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|  | ***Technological*** | ***Compositionality*** | ***Social*** |
| **Site of Production** | What is the process by which the image was made? | Is it part of a wider genre? | When was it made? Who was it made by? And for? Why was it made? |
| **Site of the Image** | What is in the image? | How is it composed? | What meanings and interpretations might be generated from the image? |
| **Site of Circulation** | How was /is the image circulated? | How has that changed over time? | Who was / is responsible for the circulation of the image? |
| **Site of Audiencing** | How was / is the image displayed and where? | What viewing positions were / are offered? | How was / is the image interpreted and by whom? |

**Activity**

Use Rose’s framework to carry out an analysis of an image or art object. It could be anything from a family photograph to a Michaelangelo painting. When you are getting started, don’t get hung up on the different modalities – we have included these for your reference as you may want to use this methodology in future research. Here is a list of simple questions you consider:

* What you know about who produced this image? Or where and when it was produced?
* What you think motivated them? Why did they bother to make this image? Who did they expect to look at it?
* Take some time to look at the content of the image. Can you describe what you see? Does anything jump out at you as important?
* Can you work out how the image was made? Is it a print? Or a painting? Or a photograph? Is it unique or does it exist in multiple forms?
* Who would have consumed the image when it was first published? And how would they have consumed it?
* How has the image travelled over time? Or across the globe?
* Who do you think is viewing it now? Where do they encounter it? And what are they seeing?

Some other things that you might think about:

* How you found using the Rose system of visual analysis. Did you find it useful? Or did you find it frustrating?
* See if you can point out one thing you would not have seen in your image or one thing you only thought about as a result of using the Rose methodology. What did it help you to think or see?