

# STEPS FOR CONDUCTING A VISUAL ANALYSIS VIA WORDPRESS

## visual analysis

examines how a visual object, be an artwork or architectural built, speaks for its sociocultural meanings and historical transitions through its formal elements. The formal elements or visual attributes, pending upon the specific work, could include composition, color, texture (art) or site, scale, space, structure (architecture). The objective of visual analysis, the courtyard house for instance, might be to determine how the changing styles of the traditional lodging, as architectural/visual signs speak for the changing of sociopolitical histories as well as architectural transitions. The underlying assumption of such analysis is that the selected visual image is in some way culturally significant and requires decoding and analysis. The pool of visual examples or primary sources- such as transition from the imperial to modern, from rural to urban and between the local and global-is rich for your research.

## wordpress

the class will use WordPress as a platform, where students will share their visual analysis online and generate a peer-learning and opinion-sharing environment for the course. David Israel, senior producer for academic media, will create and manage the website.

## working steps

### A. preparation

**step 1**

- Image selection: select one or two visual images of the given subject that is appealing to your eyes and inviting discussion;
- Citation credit: provide the images with citation credit via the order of the author/artist/architect, title, material/medium, size, and year, if there is any;
- Denotation of formal elements: collect signs of denotations or visual code, such as the form, design, color, symbols, medium, materials, etc.,

### B. composition

**step 2**

- Thesis statement: make a critical claim or thesis statement, indicating social-cultural connotations that the selected image embodies
- Process of visual analysis: analyze and explain HOW each formal element speaks for its social-cultural meanings. Further support your analysis with social-historical context and secondary readings, if applicable. Organize the analysis with the structure of one focal idea/element in one paragraph before you move to the next.
- Conclusion: what do you learn from this visual analysis of the selected image.

finally post your analysis, one page in single space (about 500-600 words), to your WordPress folder. The visual analysis will be wonderful materials to be used for your oral presentation or final research project. Be creative in form and critical in content!

## former student's writing samples



Chen Qiulin's photograph, *Solidified Scenery*, is a piece of performance art that displays the photographer's discomfort with the changing landscape that she once used to call home. She employs a gender perspective in her portrayal of both the natural and urban landscape—where they are female and male, respectively. By contrasting the beauty of the bride in the foreground with the destruction created by industrialization behind her, Qiulin utilizes gender stereotypes to create a dialogue between the natural and man-made landscape.

The photographer juxtaposes the purity of the bride, with the impurity of the destruction [rubble]. The bridal identity implies the stereotypical ideal feminine beauty and natural purity—a perfection that is specific to her. This is in stark contrast to the large and powerful industrial machines displayed in the background, which represent urbanization not just as masculine, but also as a destructive force – reinforcing the male gender stereotype. The bride is not facing the “impurity of the rubble.” In this way, she cannot see the impurity exhibited by her husband breaking the “bondage” or marriage created by identifying with the industrial landscape. The bride and groom are separated in this picture in order to point out the destruction of the purity that defines the bondage of marriage. The rubble is the pictorial evidence of the natural beauty of the landscape slowly being destroyed by the hand of the masculine power in this photo—the machines.

The photographer contrasts the ideal and reality in this picture by using characteristics of the female stereotype as well as composition. The stereotype, or ideal image of a female, is having feminine characteristics, such as beauty and vulnerability. Not only does Qiulin display a female, she displays a female in her most beautiful and most vulnerable form—as a bride. The photographer uses the perspective in which the bride is displayed in the foreground so it is the first thing you see when looking at the photograph, which evokes the stereotypical images. When you examine the photograph more closely, however, reality sets in, as the images of the rubble and the bride side by side tarnishes the natural beauty and purity of the bride.

Compositionally, Qiulin by placing herself in the image as the bride reinforces and augments the harsh reality through her personal perspective. This personalization is especially emotive because Chen grew up in a small town in central China along the Yangzi River called Wanxian—where modernization and urbanization occurred a decade later than in Southeast Asia. This modernization and urbanization began with the construction of the Three Gorges Dam project [an extremely ambitious hydropower plant] on the Yangzi River. Thus, Qiulin is not just an artist conveying some thought, but a human witness to the ongoing destruction of the natural landscape. While keeping the memory of the “ideal” [bride] Wanxian, she also has first-hand experience with the reality of urbanization [the ruins behind her]. In this harsh reality, she stands vulnerable [stereotype of a women/bride] because the life she once knew so well, is disappearing right before her eyes. Qiulin uses both gender and composition in order to enhance the brutal reality of urbanization in a place she once knew as home.

Chen invites conversation and contemplation a changing China, and the way the Chinese interact with the dramatically shifting living environment, through a gender perspective. She juxtaposes the man-made, masculine, mass-killing [of the environment] machines, with the natural, feminine beauty of the bride. Through this she contrasts the natural landscape with the ruined, urbanized and scape. She evokes disheartened feelings of abandonment as China blindly moves toward the future, modernization and urbanization.

### more examples from wordpress blogs of another course

<https://courses.bowdoin.edu/asian-studies-2016-spring-2016/>

### online reference on visual analysis (art & architecture)

- Writing and Research in Art History:  
<https://www.skidmore.edu/arhistory/academic/writing/visual.php>
- Illustrated dictionaries:  
<https://buffaloah.com/dics/dics.html>
- The Language of Architecture: 26 Principles Every Architect Should Know