

How to analyse an artwork - my example



Identify:

Renee Magritte
The Lovers II
1928

Research

Some information written about the artwork by the artist, art critics, museums etc. - I found 2 sources:

MOMA

Frustrated desires are a common theme in René Magritte's work. Here, a barrier of fabric prevents the intimate embrace between two lovers, transforming an act of passion into one of isolation and frustration. Some have interpreted this work as a depiction of the inability to fully unveil the true nature of even our most intimate companions.

Enshrouded faces were a common **motif** in Magritte's art. The artist was 14 when his mother committed suicide by drowning. He witnessed her body being fished from the water, her wet nightgown wrapped around her face. Some have speculated that this trauma inspired a series of works in which Magritte obscured his **subjects'** faces. Magritte disagreed with such interpretations, denying any relation between his **paintings** and his mother's death. "My painting is visible images which conceal nothing," he wrote, "they evoke mystery and, indeed, when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question, 'What does it mean?' It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable."

The elements that make up this painting are the room and the lovers. Unlike the erotic and romantic scene of The Kiss by Gustav Klimt, Magritte presented two figures with their faces covered by a white cloth, locked in an ambiguous setting, and unable to truly communicate or touch, many wonder if this is a kiss of denied love. The deathlike cloth keeps the two figures forever apart and as such create an atmosphere of mystery which celebrated this image. The way the room is painted makes it seem almost insignificant. The bold colors are shadowed and there are no windows to give perspective. However it is unusual to see a room with such a variety of colored walls. The lovers are the primary object and the one that adds the most mystery and intrigue. The way they are both positioned is suggestive. The man is in a dominant position with his shoulders angled. The woman appears to be tilting her head up towards him.

The way they are both positioned is suggestive. The man is in a dominant position with his shoulders angled. The woman appears to be tilting her head up towards him but after looking at the position of her body as well it appears more like she is leaning backwards. The most significant aspect of the lovers is the veils. It is actually a rather bland painting however by simply covering the faces with veils it becomes far more interesting and thought provoking. The psychological impact however is far greater with all of these elements. The color blue is associated with calm or water which is associated with life. The color red is associated with anger, lust and love while white is associated with purity which also happens to be the least shown. Black is commonly associated with death which the man may be representative of. The woman is dressed in red which may mean love or passion. The veils are of a whitish or grayish color and depending upon how you see it could mean purity or could mean the purity is fading or tainted. Trying to put all of these elements together to form a single meaning is rather difficult. It is the culmination of elements that are supposed to impact the viewer. The Lovers is one such painting that intrigues and provokes thought. but after looking at the position of her body as well it appears more like she is leaning backwards. The most significant aspect of the lovers is the veils. It is actually a rather bland painting however by simply covering the faces with veils it becomes far more interesting and thought provoking. The psychological impact however is far greater with all of these elements. The color blue is associated with calm or water which is associated with life. The color red is associated with anger, lust and love while white is associated with purity which also happens to be the least shown. Black is commonly associated with death which the man may be representative of. The woman is dressed in red which may mean love or passion. The veils are of a whitish or grayish color and depending upon how you see it could mean purity or could mean the purity is fading or tainted. Trying to put all of these elements together to form a single meaning is rather difficult. It is the culmination of elements that are supposed to impact the viewer. *The Lovers* is one such painting that intrigues and provokes thought.

Techniques used: How is it created?

Eg. Paint, collage, print, pencil, a mix of these?

How is paint applied? – smoothly, thickly, carefully, invisibly, erratically?

Can you see the brush strokes or is it smooth?

What do the brush strokes tell us about the mood of the painting?

How do these techniques affect how you see the artwork?

For example, do they suggest it is calming/chaotic, ordered/anarchic, realistic/surreal, happy/sad, scary/safe?

Colours

What are the main colours?

Primary, secondary, hot, cold, pastels, bold, muted, shiny/dull?

How do the colours affect your reading of the artwork?

What mood do the colours suggest?

Happy/sad, sinister/fun, sombre/bright



Renee Magritte
The Lovers II
1928

My examples:

Techniques Used: Oil painting. The brush strokes are smooth and flat letting the folds of the fabric flow around the faces. The technique does not interfere with the viewer's observation of the lovers, but allows the eye to flow across the painting. It gives a restful feel to the painting, despite the disturbing subject matter.

The colours are muted and within a limited colour band of brick red and a dark ocean blue. These colours are reflected in the cloth that is wrapped around the heads. This helps blend the figures with the background as your eye flows naturally between the 'grey/white' fabric and the blue and red of the background. The red of the woman's dress is similar to the red of the wall and helps the figures fit with the background.

COMPOSITION - ISSUES AND ELEMENTS

Format



Portrait format



Landscape format



Square format



Grid Format

Location/Depth of field



Foreground

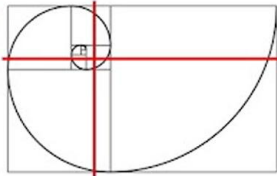


Midground



Background

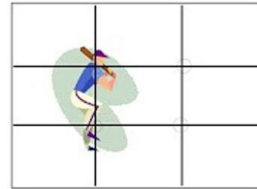
Placement/Focal Point



Golden Section



Centered



Rule of Thirds



Cropped or Closure



Lines



Leading Line



Framing



Diagonal



Horizontal



Vertical

COMPOSITION and CONTENT

Use the composition slide to gather information from for these following questions.

How would you describe the artwork to a blind person.

How does the artist arrange the content in the frame.

What effect does the artist want to create by using these elements in this way.

Overall, why do you think the artist has chosen to compose this work in these ways.



Renee Magritte

The Lovers II

1928

My example.

The painting is a shortened landscape format. The lovers are in the foreground and the background is a moody, turquoise sky blue. There is a sense of the diagonal from the corner of the ceiling - the white cornice, to the white cloth of the male head to the white cloth on the female head. The lines of the fabric of the female head are on the same diagonal slant. This give a sense of movement as your eye travels across the painting to follow this line. The lovers are framed by the red wall and ceiling.

The figures are centered from the shoulders up. The male is taller than the female. They are in a close embrace, kissing each other through the veils. We assume the figures are male and female because one is wearing a dress and the other a suit and tie.

The figures are close yet kept apart by the veils over their heads.

COMPOSITION

My Annotated example - what I did.

I looked at the composition slide and described the *format*:

The painting is a shortened landscape format.

I then looked at *location* on the composition slide and described the background colours:

The lovers are in the foreground and the background is a moody, turquoise sky blue.

I looked at what *line* Magritte used and the colours of these:

There is a sense of the diagonal from the corner of the ceiling - the white cornice, to the white cloth of the male head to the white cloth on the female head. The lines of the fabric of the female head are on the same diagonal slant.

I thought about what this made my eyes do when I look carefully at the painting:

This give a sense of movement as your eye travels across the painting to follow this line.

I looked carefully at the painting to see what *placement* or *framing* I could see:

The lovers are framed by the red wall and ceiling. The figures are centered from the shoulders up.

Then I described what I saw as the *subject matter*:

The male is taller than the female. They are in a close embrace, kissing each other through the veils. We assume the figures are male and female because one is wearing a dress and the other a suit and tie.

The figures are close yet kept apart by the veils over their heads.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT - MEANING?

Concepts and themes the artist is conveying:

- What do you think the artwork is about? Eg. What do you think the veils on the face could represent and why?
- How effective is the use of colour in this work? What does the colour make you feel about the artwork?
- If you had this artwork on your wall and walked past it every day what feeling would it evoke in you?
- How good do you think this work is?

For merit and excellence grades you need to research the artwork and find out what the artist intended and reference this in your answer.

The next slide breaks down content, composition and colour to help you write about the artwork as a whole. You could use this method to do your own example.



Renee Magritte
The Lovers II
1928

How does content, colour and composition combine to project an idea?

List information about these three elements to help you write your final statement. Your statement should say what you think the artwork is about and justify it by referring to what you see in the content, colour and composition.

My Example of note-taking:

Colour

Muted red.
Moody, dull turquoise.
grey/white veils.
Clothing matches walls.

Feelings: dull and
suppressed
Evokes sadness

Composition

Diagonals of the veils.
Framing by the wall and ceiling.
Cropped from the chest up.
Figures in foreground.
Short depth of field.

Content

Two people, male and female in a close embrace.
Both figures are from the chest up and their faces are covered by the veils, which outlines their faces.
They are unable to kiss, even though the artwork is called "The Lovers".
The walls and ceiling lend a claustrophobic feel to the artwork because they closely frame the lovers.

Use these notes to write your statement about the meaning of the artwork. My example is on the next slide.

This is your statement about the artwork – what does it say to you and why?

My Example:

Meaning of the artwork:

I think this artwork is about unrequited love. A type of Romeo and Juliette scenario where the lovers are passionately in love but not allowed to be together. **The reason I think this is because** the lovers have a veil across their faces so they cannot see each other and cannot kiss properly, there is always a barrier between them. **The composition supports this idea because** as well as the cloth across their faces, the framing of them between the wall and the ceiling produces a trapped feeling. **The colour is effective** in linking the lovers and their surroundings together as the colours of the clothing and background are similar, enveloping them in a cocoon of colour. The dull muted colours also suggest sadness, not joy.

Some art critics believe the painting references Magritte's mother's suicidal drowning and the way her dress was wrapped around her face when she was dragged from the water. **Magritte denied this and said:** "My painting is visible images which conceal nothing," he wrote, "they evoke mystery and, indeed, when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question, 'What does it mean?' It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable."

Although Magritte denied that the death of mother as an influence in his artwork, **I believe** it would still have had a subliminal effect on his artwork.

What I did

After looking at the information I had written about colour, composition and content, I decided what I thought the painting was about:

I think this artwork is about unrequited love. A type of Romeo and Juliette scenario where the lovers are passionately in love but not allowed to be together.

I then looked at the painting to find evidence for my decision:

The reason I think this is because the lovers have a veil across their faces so they cannot see each other and cannot kiss properly, there is always a barrier between them.

I looked for evidence in the composition to support my idea:

The composition supports this idea because as well as the cloth across their faces, the framing of them between the wall and the ceiling produces a trapped feeling.

I then looked at the colour to see how this supports my idea:

The colour is effective in linking the lovers and their surroundings together as the colours of the clothing and background are similar, enveloping them in a cocoon of colour. The dull muted colours also suggest sadness, not joy.

Referencing others:

I looked back at my research to see what other art critics had said that had relevance to my idea:

Some art critics believe the painting references Magritte's mother's suicidal drowning and the way her dress was wrapped around her face when she was dragged from the water.

What did the artist say?

Magritte denied this and said: "My painting is visible images which conceal nothing," he wrote, "they evoke mystery and, indeed, when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question, 'What does it mean?' It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable."

What do I think about his thoughts?

Although Magritte denied that the death of his mother was an influence in his artwork, **I believe** it would still have had a subliminal effect on his artwork.

My finished example



Renee Magritte
The Lovers II
1928

Composition

The painting is a shortened landscape format. The lovers are in the foreground and the background is a moody, turquoise sky blue. There is a sense of the diagonal from the corner of the ceiling - the white cornice, to the white cloth of the male head to the white cloth on the female head. The lines of the fabric of the female head are on the same diagonal slant. This gives a sense of movement as your eye travels across the painting to follow this line. The lovers are framed by the red wall and ceiling.

The figures are centered from the shoulders up. The male is taller than the female. They are in a close embrace, kissing each other through the veils. We assume the figures are male and female because one is wearing a dress and the other a suit and tie.

The figures are close yet kept apart by the veils over their heads.

Techniques Used: Oil painting. The brush strokes are smooth and flat letting the folds of the fabric flow around the faces. The technique does not interfere with the viewer's observation of the lovers, but allows the eye to flow across the painting. It gives a restful feel to the painting, despite the disturbing subject matter.

The colours are muted and within a limited colour band of brick red and a dark ocean blue. These colours are reflected in the cloth that is wrapped around the heads. This helps blend the figures with the background as your eye flows naturally between the 'grey/white' fabric and the blue and red of the background. The red of the woman's dress is similar to the red of the wall and helps the figures fit with the background.

Meaning

I think this artwork is about unrequited love. A type of Romeo and Juliette scenario where the lovers are passionately in love but not allowed to be together. **The reason I think this is because** the lovers have a veil across their faces so they cannot see each other and cannot kiss properly, there is always a barrier between them. **The composition supports this idea because** as well as the cloth across their faces, the framing of them between the wall and the ceiling produces a trapped feeling. **The colour is effective** in linking the lovers and their surroundings together as the colours of the clothing and background are similar, enveloping them in a cocoon of colour. The dull muted colours also suggest sadness, not joy.

Other people's comment

Some art critics believe the painting references Magritte's mother's suicidal drowning and the way her dress was wrapped around her face when she was dragged from the water.

Magritte denied this and said: "My painting is visible images which conceal nothing," he wrote, "they evoke mystery and, indeed, when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question, 'What does it mean?' It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable."

Although Magritte denied that the death of his mother was an influence in his artwork, **I believe** it would still have had a subliminal effect on his artwork.