

Te Ara a Tāwhaki

Representation in Art

Deciphering Visual Codes

Beyond the composition:

- Denotation
- Connotation
- Mnemonic
- Polemic

Denotation

Refers to the literal meaning of a word, the 'dictionary definition'.

Denotation – example



Hiria Anderson, *Mōrena*, 2017

oil on canvas

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2019

[‘Mōrena’](#), Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Denotation – example



Hiria Anderson, *Ahi Kā*, 2017

oil on canvas

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2019

[‘Ahi Kā’](#), Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Denotation – example

Marae (noun)

A relatively permanent enclosed construction over a plot of tribal land – has a roof and usually windows, and is often only one level; used for any of a wide variety of activities, as living, meetings or funerals.

Denotation – example



Fiona Pardington, *Still Life with Iris, Skull and Magnolia*, 2013

pigment ink on paper

Chartwell Collection

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2013

Skull (noun)

1. The bony framework of the head enclosing the brain and supporting the face; the skeleton of the head.
2. The head as the centre of knowledge and understanding; the mind.

Denotation – example



New Zealand pīwakawaka (fantail), North Island adult calling, [New Zealand Birds Online](#), courtesy of Ormond Torr

This is an opportunity to challenge students to consider the Indigenous reference and definition for this bird, like te reo Māori. You can find definitions in [Te Aka Māori Dictionary](#).

Connotation

Refers to the associations that are connected to a certain word or the emotional suggestions related to that word.

Connotation – example



Hiria Anderson, *Mōrena*, 2017

oil on canvas

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2019

[‘Mōrena’](#), Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Connotation – example



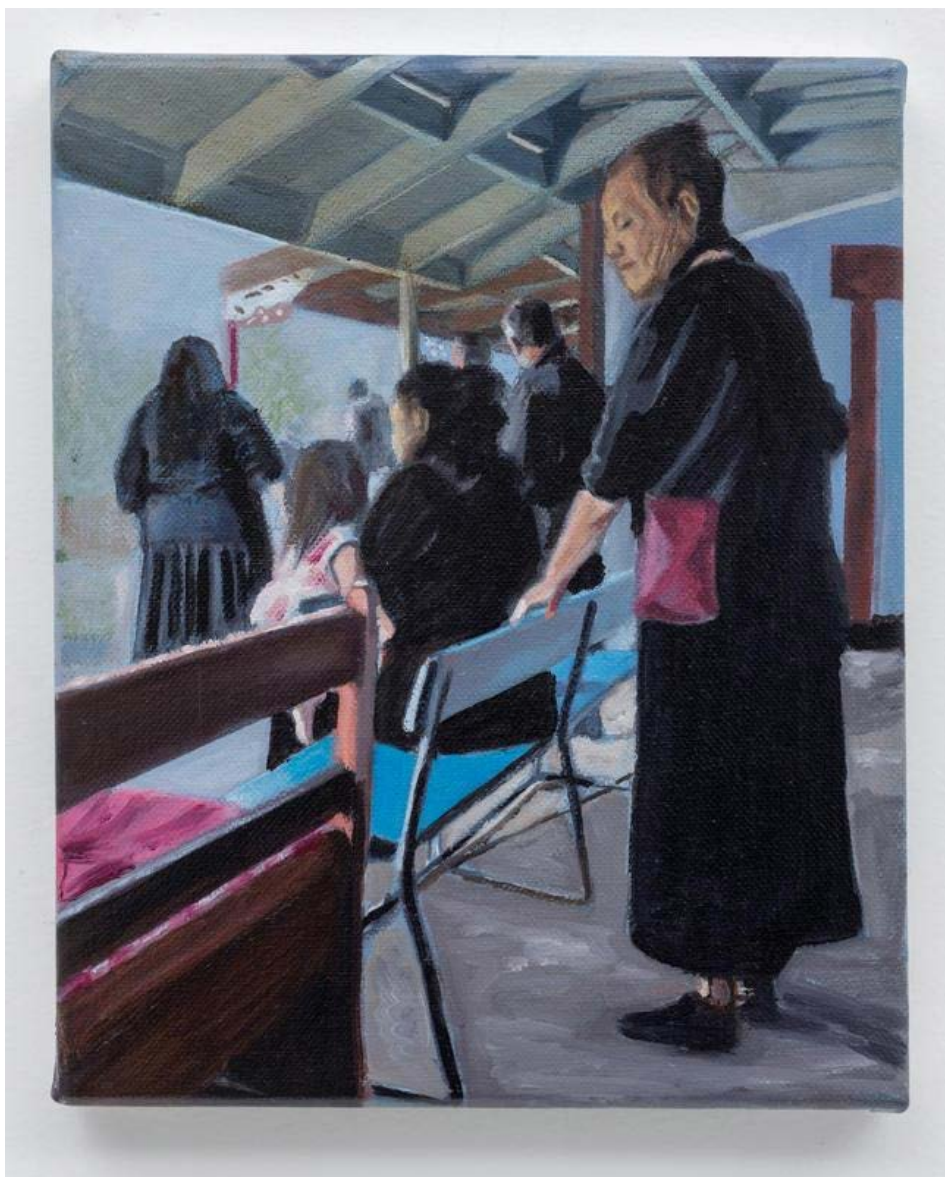
Hiria Anderson, *Ahi Kā*, 2017

oil on canvas

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2019

[‘Ahi Kā’](#), Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Connotation – example



Hiria Anderson, *He waiata tangi*, 2019
oil on canvas
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2019

[*'He waiata tangi'*](#), Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Connotation – example

Marae (noun)

A figurative form that symbolises a given iwi or hapū's ancestor.

Connotation – example



Fiona Pardington, *Still Life with Iris, Skull and Magnolia*, 2013

pigment ink on paper

Chartwell Collection

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 2013

This image is often associated with the Western symbolism relating to death. But the tapu (sacred) aspect of the head could connote an individual's mana.

To most cultures, the skull is considered a symbol of death and the unachievable nature of immortality.

For Māori, the head is the most sacred part of the body that contains the mana of a person.

Connotation – example



New Zealand pīwakawaka (fantail), North Island adult calling, [New Zealand Birds Online](#), courtesy of Ormond Torr.

The pīwakawaka (fantail) is infamous in Māori narrative for causing Māui's death. Therefore, to some Māori, a pīwakawaka is a harbinger of death, especially when seen inside in a house.

A fidgety person is described as a fantail's tail, because of the bird's restless movements.

Vanitas Still Life



Edwaert Collier, *A Vanitas Still Life*, 1699

oil on canvas

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of Sir George Grey, 1887

What are the connotations of the elements listed below?

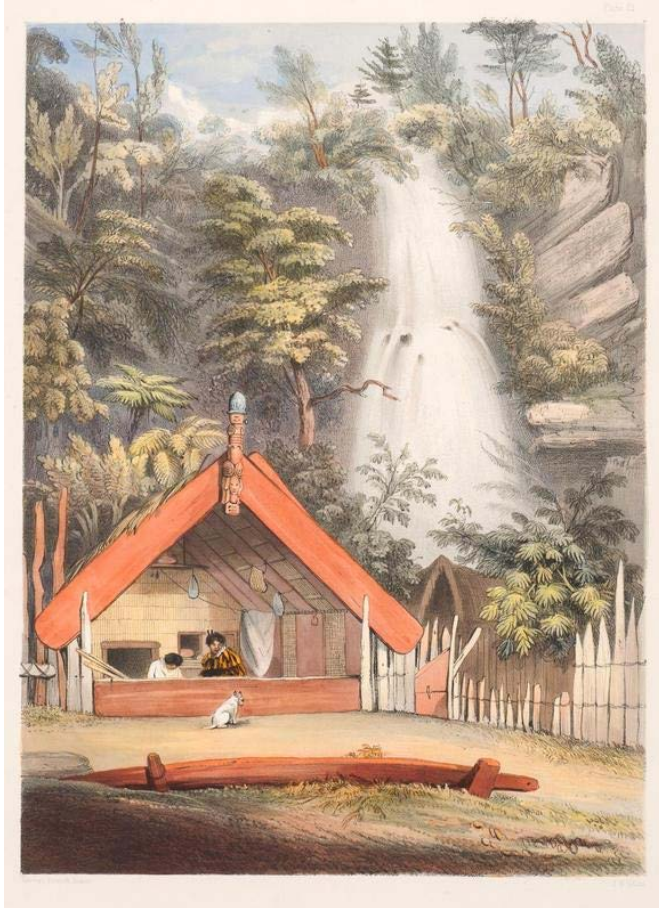
- Skull
- Candle or lamp
- Watch, hourglass or timepiece
- Books

Vanitas Still Life

Extract from [‘Vanitas Still Lives and their symbolism’](#), ArtSeed

- Skull – the fragility of life and the inevitability of mortality.
- Candle or lamp – the human soul. Its loss or blowing out symbolises the loss of the soul and the transience of life.
- Watch, hourglass or timepiece – the transience and limitation of time.
- Books – human curiosity and knowledge, and the limitations and/or temporary nature of this.

Pātaka and Marae



J W Giles, George French Angas, *House of Iwikau, brother of Te Heuheu, and Falls of Ko Waihi at Te Rapa, Taupo Lake, 1844*
 lithograph in tints, hand-coloured paper
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased with funds from the M A Serra Trust, 1987

This is another opportunity to locate the denotation of a word: pātaka and marae.

What are the connotations of these two architectural forms?

Pātaka were raised above the ground to protect food stores from rodents. These as well as marae were adorned with carved figurative forms, due to the prized possessions housed within: people, nutrition and knowledge.

Pātaka and Marae



Louis de Breton, *Cases de naturels. (Baie des Iles) [Maori Houses, Bay of Islands]*, 1840

hand-coloured lithograph

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1987

Pātaka and Marae



John Kinder, *Pataka Te Awhi*, 1866

albumen on paper

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1983

Pātaka and Marae



Josiah Martin, *Tamatekapua, Ohinemutu*, circa 1890
gelatin silver
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1984