

Terms

Aesthetics – is concerned very broadly with the consideration of what is beautiful or pleasing, or what is not beautiful or pleasing. If you contemplate anything (a sparrow, a Rothko, a till receipt) and experience the way it looks, feels, or sounds, and the kind of thoughts and emotions it produces in you, then you are having an aesthetic experience.

Agency - “The ability to exercise control over social processes and events.” (Schirato & Yell, 2000)

Alterity - "the state of being other or different"; the political, cultural, linguistic, or religious other. The study of the ways in which one group makes themselves different from others.

Appropriation – Cultural appropriation is taking anything produced within someone else’s cultural context (their cultural or intellectual property) and using it as one’s own.

Knowing the power relationship between borrower and borrowed-from is crucial to understanding how the act of appropriation alters the meaning of the cultural form borrowed. E.g. as an artist of the dominant Pakeha culture, Gordon Walters’s appropriation of the koru form for his paintings as pure form without cultural meaning can be seen as a denial of Maori culture’s right to exist on its own terms.

Atua – Spirit or God

Audiencing – The way in which a viewer of a visual image, through the act of looking and bringing their unique set of experiences to bear on it, can reshape its meaning. The visual image, therefore, has its meanings shifted by the audience.

Beliefs – Your beliefs are what you feel to be true about things for which there is no proof, or no ultimate verdict. For example, the existence of God, or the value of marriage. See IDEOLOGY, VALUES, WORLDVIEW.

Canon, the – A body of work in any genre, accepted by the culture at large as of the greatest quality and importance. All new work is judged against the canon. The canon is widely understood as an IDEOLOGICAL construct, reflecting the VALUES of those in positions of power in society to shape opinion and set standards.

Capitalism - An economic system in which the production of wealth is controlled mainly by individuals and corporations as opposed to government. Based on the ideology of free trade.

Colonialism – Policy of European nations (esp. England, Spain, France, and The Netherlands) from the 16th to the 19th centuries to extend empires by gaining control and harnessing the resources of countries in Asia, the Pacific, Africa, and the Americas. Involves both the conquest of countries economically and politically, but also the fundamental restructuring of their cultures, with enforced changes in language among other things.

Context – refers to the circumstances within which art is created, eg personal, social, historical, cultural, geographical, environmental, economic, political, religious, artistic, gender, philosophical. Relationships between art and context may include the ways that art reflects, reacts against, is stimulated by, is shaped by, and / or affects the context in which it is created.

Diaspora - "...the existence of various communities, usually of a particular ethnicity, culture, or nation, scattered across places outside of their land of origin or homeland. There are, for example, large diasporic communities of Jews throughout the world," (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

East, the – In the West we have traditionally used this term to refer geographically and culturally to 'Asia', which in NZ means countries like China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Through Western Art History the aesthetics of the East have often been in fashion (e.g. Chinoiserie, Orientalism, Japonisme), and various avant-garde art movements have propelled themselves forward by appropriating and assimilating Eastern visual traditions.

Empire - A political unit of centralised authority and expansive territories. E.g., The British Empire.

Essentialism - the essence or "whatness" of something. In the context of race, ethnicity, or culture, essentialism suggests the practice of various groups deciding what is and isn't a particular identity. As a practice, essentialism tends to overlook differences within groups often to maintain the status quo or obtain power. Essentialist claims can be used by a colonizing power but also by the colonized as a way of resisting what is claimed about them.

Exoticism - the process by which a cultural practice is made stimulating and exciting in its difference from the colonizer's normal perspective. Ironically, as European groups educated local, indigenous cultures, schoolchildren often began to see their native lifeways, plants, and animals as exotic, and the European counterparts as "normal" or "typical."

Feminism – has shaped the visual arts since the 1970s, by bringing the power imbalance between men and women into focus. A patriarchy by its nature refuses female admission to THE CANON. Feminist artists and scholars have sought to expose this, and revise history to include women.

Gaze - A feminist notion. The 'male GAZE', for example, describes the values and priorities that govern male perception. For example, the tendency to regard women as sexual objects.

Gender – Understood as a broad term that includes social and biological ideas, discourses, practices, subjectivities and social relationships. It considers the *differences* between men and women as social constructions (meaning our understanding of what it is to be female or male, as opposed to biological phenomena).

Globalisation – increased connectivity between the countries of the world, due to free market capitalism and even faster modes of travel, technology, and telecommunication.

Hegemony – Leadership, predominant influence, or domination exercised by one nation or social group over others. When socially powerful people use their influence to convince less powerful people it is in their best interest to do what is actually in the most powerful people's best interest, that's hegemony.

Hybridity - new transcultural forms that arise from cross-cultural exchange. Hybridity can be social, political, linguistic, religious, etc. It is not necessarily a peaceful mixture, for it can be contentious and disruptive in its experience. It may also involve societies that arise from a mixture of ethnic and racial mixing to form a new material, psychological, and spiritual self-definition.

Icon – a thing that has achieved the status of being instantly recognisable. E.g. Mt Taranaki is one of New Zealand's geographic icons.

Iconography – the identification and interpretation of the subject matter of an art work. What ‘things’ the artist has chosen to put in the work can be studied to form a better idea of its meaning. E.g. depictions of the Virgin Mary used to include a pitcher of clear water to symbolise her purity.

Identity – who you are. It’s a mixture of who you believe yourself to be and who everyone else believes you to be. Artists of the Postmodern era have had a preoccupation with identity, probably because it has been revealed as mutable, i.e. not fixed, but like gender, determined by cultural context.

Ideology – those beliefs that shape a cultural group’s perception of the world. History proves these meanings are culturally specific, but can appear to us as natural and common sense (think of the slave trade’s presumption of racial inferiority). Also see WORLD VIEW.

Indigenous culture – the original or native inhabitants of a land; a contestable notion sometimes.

Irony – when a statement is made, but it’s obvious that what is actually meant is different, e.g. the Tui beer “Yeah, right”.

Iwi – bone, people, tribe, or wider tribal group.

Kaupapa – topic, plan, principle, philosophy

Korero – talk, speeches, discussion, history, story

Kowhaiwhai – patterns on the rafters (heke) of a meeting house (whare).

Mana – authority, power, prestige, psychic force, all combined with humility. A quality recognised in some by others rather than something that can be acquired through one’s own work/actions alone.

Medium/media – the means of communication, e.g. oil on canvas, pounamu, speech, print, graffiti, performance, installation. Marshall McLuhan’s famous phrase “the medium is the message” means that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived.

Minority groups – groups whose values and customs are not well-known or represented within a mainstream culture. In New Zealand, most cultural groups apart from Pakeha can be considered minority groups.

Modernism – a period of art starting in the 18th century (the Enlightenment), and ending in the mid-20th century. 18th century painters such as Manet began allowing visible brushstrokes into their paintings, drawing the viewer’s attention to the canvas. This tiny shift meant the work stopped being a window into another world and began to be an “object” in itself. This aspect grew as “modernity” progressed, and resulted in the key modern phrase “form is content”, i.e. the paintwork/materiality of the object is what the work is about.

Other - the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group. By declaring someone "Other," persons tend to stress what makes them dissimilar from or opposite of another, and this carries over into the way they represent others, especially through stereotypical images.

Pakeha – In New Zealand, a white-skinned person, European, or foreigner. Related to pakepakeha and pakehakeha, imaginary beings with fair skin.

Parody – to mimic something in order to mock it. See IRONY.

Patriarchy – from a feminist perspective, the prevailing ideology of most societies in which men hold the power and women are mostly excluded from it. These male-centred societies reward and privilege males and “masculine attributes” such as individualism, competitiveness, aggression, and linear-thinking.

Pop / popular culture – as opposed to high cultural forms for elite or niche groups (for example, fine art, literature, classical music), the forms of pop culture are in mass circulation and come from fashion, music, sport, and film. The world of pop culture entered Art in the early 1960’s through Pop Art (e.g. Andy Warhol).

Postcolonialism – a shift in a colonial country’s understanding of itself in which a new regard for indigenous sovereignty is established, with the original colonial practices no longer seen as valid. The postcolonial nation (NZ for example) is in a process of recognition of indigenous grievances and redress.

Postmodernism – comes after the height of MODERNISM. What has changed is a way of understanding the world. To the modernist mind, concepts of authenticity, authorship, and the idea of style progression were important.

“Postmodernism starts from the assumption that grand utopias are impossible. It accepts that reality is fragmented and that personal identity is an unstable quantity transmitted by a variety of cultural factors. Postmodernism advocates an irreverent, playful treatment of one’s own identity, and a liberal society” (Riemschneider & Grosenick, 1999).

Race - the division and classification of human beings by physical and biological characteristics. Race often is used by various groups to either maintain power or to stress solidarity. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it was often used as a pretext by European colonial powers for slavery and/or the "white man's burden."

Treaty of Waitangi – The guarantee of protection offered to Maori in exchange for sovereignty, agreed to by those Maori chiefs signing the document at Russell in 1840. Considered the founding document of New Zealand as it sets out the nature of the partnership between Maori and Pakeha, although this is contestable due to ambiguity surrounding each party’s understanding of the word “sovereignty”.

Turangawaewae – standing place from where one gains the authority to belong. Determined by one’s iwi or hapu.

Values – one’s principles or standards; one’s judgement of what is valuable or important in life, e.g. the Abstract Expressionists valued creative freedom, whereas the Nazis valued conformity.

West, the – European civilisation and that which has sprung from it. Now more of a way of life (capitalist, developed, affluent) than a geographical location, which can be found in any part of the globe. See THE EAST.