**Tools for Visual Analysis**

It is important to analyze and evaluate images you use for research, study, and presentations. Images should be analyzed and evaluated like any other source, such as journal articles or books, to determine their quality, reliability, and appropriateness.

Images should be analyzed on several levels. Visual analysis is an important step in evaluating an image and understanding its meaning. It is also important to consider textual information provided with the image, the image source and original context of the image, and the technical quality of the image. The following questions can help guide your analysis and evaluation.

**Content analysis**

* What do you see? – What’s represented in the work?
* What is the image about? – What is the subject matter?
* Is a narrative suggested?
* Are there people in the image? What are they doing? How are they presented?
* Can the image be looked at in different ways?
* How effective is the image as a visual message?

**Visual analysis**

* How is the image composed? What is in the background, and what is in the foreground?
* What are the most important visual elements in the image? How can you tell?
* How is color used?
* Can the image be looked at in different ways?
* What meanings are conveyed by design choices?

**Contextual information**

* What information accompanies the image?
* Does the text change how you see the image? How?
* Is the textual information intended to be factual and informative, or is it intended to influence what and how you see?
* What kind of context does the information provide? Does it answer the questions Where, How, Why, and for whom was the image made?

**Image source**

* Where did you find the image?
* What information does the source provide about the origins of the image?
* Is the source reliable and trustworthy?
* Was the image found in an image database, or was it being used in another context to convey meaning?

**Technical quality**

* Is the image large enough to suit your purposes? What are its dimensions?
* How does the size of the image relate to the viewer?
* Are the color, light, and balance true?
* Is the image a quality digital image, without pixelation or distortion?
* Is the image in a file format you can use?
* Are there copyright or other use restrictions you need to consider?

**Other Aspects to Consider:**

**Temporal Impressions:** Think about the object/image’s relationship to time. Does it imply or require a narrative or an action? Does it assume something has already happened? Or that something will happen? Does it assume a readily recognizable identity? Meaning, does it require the viewer to have some kind of prior knowledge to what it is? Does it attempt to evoke timelessness? If so, how well does it succeed and why?

**Sensory Impressions:** What are your own sensory responses to the object/image? Consider all of your senses: Hearing, smell, touch, taste, and vision. Project yourself into the depicted space and consider the sensory field implied by it.

**Physical Expression:** Examine the anatomy and poses of the figures. Do they look natural? What about their facial expression, gestures, body positions? What kinds of messages are communicated through the figure’s body language?