

UNDERSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHS

VISUAL

The Formal Elements:

- *Focus* - Which areas appear clearer or sharpest?
- *Light* - Where are the highlights and shadows? Can you guess the time of day? Is the light natural or artificial, harsh or soft, direct or reflected?
- *Line* - What are the dominant lines in the image? Are they straight or curved, thin or thick? Do they create direction, do they outline, do they indicate movement?
- *Repetition* - Are objects, shapes or lines repeated in the image? Does this create a pattern?
- *Shape (2D)* - Do you see geometric or organic shapes? What are they? How do they relate to each other?
- *Form (3D)* - Do the objects in the image appear three dimensional? What creates this effect?
- *Space* - Is there depth in the image or does it seem shallow? Is there negative space?
- *Texture* - If you could touch the surface of the photograph how would it feel?
- *Tone* - Is there a range of tones from dark to light? Where are the darkest and lightest parts of the image? Is there contrast? What is the proportion of greys (mid tones?)
- *Colour* - Is colour a significant feature of the image? Are there any complimentary colours? Can you attach any symbolism/meaning to the colours displayed?

Composition:

Arrangement of formal elements, Rule of Thirds, Cropping/Framing, Foreground/Middle ground/Background, Viewpoint, Balance, Harmony, Contrast, Tension etc.

CONTEXTUAL

Historical:

Place in time, local/national/global events. History of Photography - tools and equipment, movements, styles, genres and ideas. Significant practitioners/publications/exhibitions etc.

Biographical:

What do we know about the photographer? What relevance does this knowledge have to the image(s)?

Psychological:

How do you feel when you look at the image? What feelings/states of mind are suggested by the image? What theories of mind are relevant to an interpretation of the image?

Theoretical:

Can you apply any theories to your understanding of the image (e.g. cultural, political, philosophical/aesthetic)?

TECHNICAL

Lighting:

Type of lighting e.g. available (daylight, street lights), additional (studio lights, flash, reflector) or combination?

Aperture:

Type of lens (wide angle, telephoto, macro etc.) f-stops, Depth of Field (DOF) - deep/ shallow, focal point - selective focus, in and out of focus, vignette

Shutter Speed:

Exposure time, over/under exposed, motion blur, panning

ISO:

Film speed/sensitivity (fast = higher number, grainier/noisier image), tonal range, contrast

White Balance:

Colour cast/temperature, colour accuracy, warm/cold

CONCEPTUAL

Connections:

- What connections can you make to your previous knowledge?
- What relationships can you see between this image and other images by this or a different photographer?
- What ideas/views do you think the image helps to communicate?
- What influence might this image have on the development of your own work?
- What have you learned from exploring and analysing this image?