

# How to analyze a work of art

This guide lists a selection of the more important information sources on Art History available at Concordia Libraries. It includes material held in the Webster Library (WEB) on the Sir George Williams Downtown Campus and/or in the Vanier Library (VAN) on the Loyola Campus. (Please note that this is not a complete list).

For more information consult the Research Guides by Subject available on the Libraries' web site at <http://library.concordia.ca/research/subjects/arthistory/>.

## 1. Find out basic information about the artist and art work in dictionaries and encyclopedias

Dictionary of Art – 34 vol.	REF N 31 D5 1996 WEB
Dictionary of Women Artists – 2 vol.	REF N 8354 D53 1997 WEB
Encyclopedia of World Art	REF N 31 E5 WEB/VAN
Encyclopédie de l'Art: Peinture	REF N 5300 M55714 WEB/VAN
<a href="#">Grove Dictionary of Art</a>	
McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Art	REF N 33 M23 WEB
Modern Arts Criticism – 4 vol.	REF N 7482 M64 1991 WEB
<a href="#">Oxford Reference: Art &amp; Architecture</a>	
Who Was Who in American Art	REF N 6536 W52+ 1985 WEB
Who's Who in American Art	REF N 6536 W5 WEB
Who's Who in Art	REF N 40 W6 WEB
World Artists	REF N 6489 W67 1991 WEB/VAN

## 2. Describe the work of art

Keep in mind the framework of analysis you have learnt in class and the information you can collect from the texts on art criticism. You may want to trace it and schematically jot down colours, use of lines, compositional elements, etc. Familiarize yourself with the techniques used by the artist. See reference sources such as:

A Dictionary of Art Terms and Techniques	REF N 33 M36 WEB
Dictionnaire des Termes d'art	REF N 33 J3 WEB
Illustrated Dictionary of Art Terms	REF N 33 R49 WEB
Le Langage des Styles	REF N 33 B33 WEB
<a href="#">Oxford Reference: Art &amp; Architecture</a>	

Check CLUES for other books. If you know the Subject Heading (examples listed below), you can use a SUBJECT search. Otherwise try a KEYWORD search.

Art – Technique  
Artists' materials  
Collage

Color  
Composition (Art)  
Form (Art)

Painting - Technique  
Sculpture – Technique  
Tempera painting

### **3. Analyze the theme and subject of the work of art**

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A Dictionary of Pictorial Subjects from Classical Literature: A Guide to Their Identification in Works of Art	REF N 7760 P68 1983 WEB
Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art	REF N 7560 H34 WEB/VAN
Dictionary of Symbols in Western Art	REF N 7740 C29 1995 WEB/VAN
Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art – 2 vol.	REF N 7560 E53 1998 WEB
Encyclopedia of Themes and Subjects in Paintings	REF ND 1288 D3 1971 WEB
Gods and Heroes in Art	REF N 7760 I 4713 2002 WEB
La Grammaire des Formes et des Styles: le Monde chrétien	REF N 7830 M741+ 1982 WEB
The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300-1990s	REF NX 650 M9R45 1993 WEB

Check CLUES for books which examine themes in art. If you know the Subject Heading (examples listed below), you can use a SUBJECT search. Otherwise try a KEYWORD search.

Christian art and symbolism	Mythology, classical in art
Human figure in art	Symbolism in art
National characteristics in art	Women in art

### **4. Consult books that recommend methods for the interpretation, appreciation and analysis of a work of art**

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Check CLUES. If you know the Subject Heading (examples listed below), you can use a SUBJECT search. Otherwise try a KEYWORD search.

Aesthetics	Art criticism	Visual perception
Art appreciation	Feminist art criticism	

### **5. Examine the work of art in relation to similar works of art of that period**

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Consult general texts on the period in CLUES. If you know the Subject Heading (examples listed below), you can use a SUBJECT search. Otherwise try a KEYWORD search.

Painting, Renaissance	Impressionism
Art - Italy	Modernism (Art) - Canada - Chronology

In addition, consult reference sources, which provide an overview of important events, such as:

Artspeak: a Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements	REF N 6490 A87 1997 WEB
Contemporary Art Trends, 1960-1980: A Guide to Sources	REF N 6490 B36+ WEB
Key Dates in Art History	REF N 5303 M23+ 1979 WEB
Timelines of the Arts and Literature	REF NX 447.5 B76 1994 WEB

### **6. Find out how other artists of that period as well as earlier and later periods have treated a similar subject matter**

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Look up the theme of the work of art in:

Index to Reproductions of European Paintings	REF ND 45 M6 WEB
Mythological and Classical World Art Index	REF N 7760 R63 1991 WEB
World Painting Index: First Supplement, 1973-1980	REF ND 45 H38 WEB/VAN
The World's Master Paintings: From the Early Renaissance to the Present Day	REF ND 40 W75 1991 WEB

## **7. Examine the context in which the artist worked**

Check CLUES for books. If you know the Subject Heading (some examples listed below), you can use a SUBJECT search. Otherwise try a KEYWORD search.

Art – Philosophy	Italy - History
Art - Political aspects	Italy - Social life and customs
Art and Society	Women - History and - Social conditions
Art and Religion	Women artists

## **8. Find out if there are primary source materials on the artist**

These may be in the form of autobiographical, biographical, or historical information. Letters, poems or stories by the artist or recollections about the artist or associate can provide valuable insights. Primary sources may be reprinted separately, and/or referred to in books about the artist and general texts of the period.

For general sources consult books in CLUES using the following Subject Headings:

Art - History - Sources  
Art, American - History - Sources  
Artists – Interviews

## **9. Find articles in journals or magazines using databases and indexes/abstracts**

Use the following resources to identify articles published in journals or magazines. Articles in journals often focus on some aspect of the artist's work and can provide excellent coverage of a particular issue in a few well-documented pages. Check CLUES or use the FindIt@Concordia link, available in most databases, to find out if the library subscribes to the journal(s) you have identified. Check the Concordia Library Databases pages for instructions on connecting from home <http://library.concordia.ca/research/databases>

### **Major Art/Architecture Databases**

<a href="#">ARTbibliographies Modern</a> (1974-onward)	Covers 19 <sup>th</sup> century to contemporary art
<a href="#">Art Abstracts/Art Index Retrospective</a> (1929-onward)	Covers antiquity to contemporary art
<a href="#">Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals</a> (1934-onward)	Covers all periods of architecture
<a href="#">BHA: Bibliography of the History of Art on FRANCIS</a> (1991-onward)	Covers antiquity to contemporary art

### **Paper Indexes**

To find references to articles published in some earlier art journals and magazines, you can use the following indexes only available in the library:

<i>Répertoire d'Art et Archéologie</i> Covers antiquity to 20 <sup>th</sup> century	REF Z 5937 R4 WEB (1910-1989)
<i>Répertoire International de la Littérature de l'Art</i> Covers antiquity to 20 <sup>th</sup> century	INDEX N 1 R2+ WEB (1975-1989)

## **10. Find reproductions of the work**

In addition to books, journal articles, exhibition and museum catalogues which may include reproductions, you can also check the following:

[ARTstor](#)

[Art Image Web Sites](#)

## 11. Document all the sources you have consulted

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Make sure your footnotes and bibliography are properly formatted.

A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations

REF LB 2369 T8 1996 WEB/VAN

Citation Guides - Library Web Site

<http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/citations.html>

<http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/refworks.php>

## 12. Present your analysis in a scholarly format

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Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology

N 85 A 655 1995 WEB

The Methodologies of Art: An Introduction

N 7480 A32 1996 WEB

A Short Guide to Writing About Art

N 7476 B37 WEB

Thinking and Writing about Art History

N 380 R438 2004 WEB

## 13. Major Art History Web Sites

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Art History Resources on the Web

<http://witcombe.sbc.edu/ARTHLinks.html>

Artsource

<http://www.ilpi.com/artsource/>

Mother of All Art History Pages

<http://www.art-design.umich.edu/mother/>

The World Wide Web Virtual Library: History of Art

<http://www.chart.ac.uk/vlib/a-z-links.html>

For other relevant Art History web sites, see the Research Guide by Subject page

<http://library.concordia.ca/research/subjects/arthistory/>

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*If you need assistance, please ask at the Reference Desk*

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