

How We See: Objective and Subjective Means

Up until now we've been looking at artworks through the most immediate of visual effects: what we see in front of our eyes. Now we can begin to break down some barriers to finding specific meaning in art, including those of different styles and cultures. To help in this journey we need to learn the difference between looking at something in an objective way versus subjectively.

To look objectively is to get an unbiased overview of our field of vision. Subjective seeing speaks more to understanding. When we use the term “*I see*” we communicate that we understand what something means. There are some areas of learning, particularly psychology and biology, that help form the basis of understanding how we see. For example, the fact that humans perceive flat images as having a “reality” to them is very particular. In contrast, if you show a dog an image of another dog, they neither growl nor wag their tail, because they are unable to perceive flat images as containing any meaning. So you and I have actually developed the ability to “see” and read specific meanings into images.

In essence, there is more to seeing than meets the eye. We need to take into account a cultural component in how we perceive images and that we do so in subjective ways. Seeing is partly a result of cultural conditioning and biases. For example, when many of us from industrialized cultures see a parking lot, we can pick out each car immediately, while others from remote tribal cultures (who are not familiar with parking lots) cannot.

LICENSES AND ATTRIBUTIONS

CC LICENSED CONTENT, SHARED PREVIOUSLY

- How We See: Objective and Subjective Means. **Authored by:** Christopher Gildow. **Located at:** https://learn.canvas.net/courses/24/pages/m5-how-we-see-objective-and-subjective-means?module_item_id=44428. **Project:** Open Course Library. **License:** [CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike](#)