

Title of Session: ArtsSites - Visual Culture

Moderator: BJ Berquist

Guest Speaker: Justin LeBart

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BjB: Welcome to tonight's ArtsSites discussion. Justin LeBart is leading a discussion on Visual Culture

BjB: a tip before we begin...go to the Actions menu in the top right of this chat window and click on DETACH

BjB: that will make your chat window easier to read

BjB: we usually start Tapped In discussions with introductions

BjB: Please let Justin know where you are located and what you teach or hope to teach.

BjB: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania

JustinL: Hello, coming to you from Northern Arizona University, working on my masters in art ed.

MariaJM: I just started the grad student at northern Arizona university and am studying art education

PamelaS: And I am Pam, mentor to Justin and Maria.

JustinL smiles

SusanVa: I work with teachers of the arts

PamelaS: Justin and Maria are two exemplary art education students. I am eager to "hear" what they have to say about visual culture.

BjB listens eagerly also

JustinL: Are we ready?

MariaJM: yep

MariaJM: ready to learn

BjB nods to Justin

JustinL: welcome and thanks for coming

JustinL: My main goal is to begin a dialogue that will begin to clarify where this concept belongs in the classroom. I don't claim to have all the answers, in fact I think I have more questions. That is why I figure having many brains is better than one.

PamelaS: Give us your idea of the definition of VC, Justin.

JustinL: let's first look at a few definitions

BjB nods

JustinL: Artlex is an art dictionary, and has other resources

JustinL: <http://www.artlex.com/>

JustinL: go to V in the index scroll and down, until you find visual culture.

JustinL: The definition is broad, and a bit confusing, but so is this topic...that is why we are here.

MariaJM: that's what they say... collaboration

JustinL: make sure you hit control when clicking on the link

JustinL: I am curious if this definition defines anything?

BjB: did everyone get the site?

MariaJM: artlex...correct?

PamelaS: Yes ... I'm thinking.

BjB nods to Maria

JustinL: Visual culture has been around for a long time, what makes it so special now?

JustinL: or better yet what makes it different

PamelaS: I think it is our postmodernist thinking strategy that colors the concept now.

JustinL: Postmodernism hurts my brain as it is so...

JustinL: how do we make this topic accessible to your average teacher and student

BjB: we're discussing this ArtLex definition of Visual Culture: visual culture - A term which is used more and more, it refers to what we have otherwise called art, but it is more inclusive and less likely to rely upon value judgments. Visual culture includes imagery in all kinds of media, in electronic games, in sports, cosmetics (and other fashion-related settings), comic books, and politics. It involves the imagery associated with holidays and terrorism. Certain works that a Eurocentric audience might call art are not called art by the cultures that produced them can be included in discussions of visual culture, but might not be in discussions of art. Examples of such work might include kachina dolls, bonsai, and boomerangs. A related term (some would say a synonym) is material culture. The study of visual culture should promote visibility and reflexivity and empower students concerning social issues. Also see intertextuality.

JustinL: The question is does that definition clarify anything

MariaJM: I'm just re-reading it.

JustinL: take your time

BjB: is that definition a bit too broad? It seems to cover EVERYTHING!

PamelaS: Visual culture is a scary topic because ...

MariaJM: and then, as Pam would ask... if it is everything, is it anything...?

JustinL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visual_culture

JustinL: this one is a little more narrow

JustinL: Still a bit confusing?

PamelaS: I still don't think this says much that would make a teacher comfortable approaching it in the classroom.

JustinL: Amen

BjB: who determines what a "crucial visual component" is?

MariaJM: ... "and any other medium that has a crucial visual component"

PamelaS: I suspect that those of you like Justin who are getting a handle on VC are the ones who need to start thinking in terms of making VC something accessible to teachers and students.

JustinL: As far as I can tell, Visual Culture studies is almost exclusively a college level topic. Is it even important for High schoolers to get access to this information. or younger?

PamelaS: YESSSSSS!!!!

JustinL: and why?

PamelaS: How can anyone live in today's techno age and not be aware?

JustinL: It is vital to become visually literate in this visually saturated world.

PamelaS: It is imperative that we teach students how to interpret what is around them; not accept what is there as "fact".

JustinL: visual literacy is what speaks to me the most, as far as language I understand and can work with

MariaJM: I agree that younger students need to understand the visual world. this can help them to discern what is going on out there

JustinL: How can it be incorporated into your classroom?

JustinL: that is where it is at for me

PamelaS: And that is why I've been trying to write some lessons about it.

JustinL: working with curriculum that is in place already

JustinL: or do you think it has to be a new topic?

MariaJM: I think that going slow, understanding the symbols that are already in place, could be a starting point.

MariaJM: analyzing the things that we "think" we are familiar with can be helpful.

PamelaS: I think VC can be woven through existing curricula

BjB: what symbols are you referring to, Maria?

JustinL: Pam and I have been thinking about how to incorporate TV and its vast number of shows as a teaching tool,

BjB: Justin, are you talking about just art classes or all disciplines?

JustinL: In the near future I see social science getting involved

JustinL: but I don't know who else

JustinL: English?

BjB nods...language arts

JustinL: The sad fact is outside of art many curricular topics are almost set in stone

JustinL: We have the power to incorporate VC in...tomorrow

PamelaS: Give us a concrete example of incorporating VC in the classroom --- any classroom.

BjB listens

JustinL: To me using the mass media is relevant to the students...

JustinL: Look at advertising, study it analyze it and ask

JustinL: why do you like what you like?

JustinL: most students will say... Cause it's cool

JustinL: Why is it cool?

JustinL: then it's I don't know

JustinL: that dead end is where learning can happen

JustinL: Figuring out why we like what we like? was it influenced by images?

MariaJM: by pushing the harder question, I assume that is where both the teacher and student can learn together.

JustinL: and what does that mean

JustinL: of course

JustinL: Pam I will have a unit ready in 2 weeks!

PamelaS: I'm marking my plan book now.

JustinL: As teachers we are to make the invisible visible...right

PamelaS: I like this idea about VC "problematizes the unquestioned alliance between culture and visibility, specifically visual culture and vision. Cultural practices and materials emerge not solely in the visible world, but also in the social, temporal, and theoretical relations that define the invisible. Our understanding of Cultural Studies, finally, maintains that culture is fugitive and is constantly renegotiated."

PamelaS: But it needs to [be] boiled into words that are easier to digest.

JustinL: and doesn't that speak to the idea of visual culture, and just learning how to see

JustinL: I agree...

JustinL: The question of how society is portrayed in the media is a great one

JustinL: by next time we will come up with a useable definition

PamelaS: So back to the question ...

PamelaS: How do you help teachers bring this important topic to their students?

SusanVa: There are some excellent sites on media literacy

JustinL: I believe there needs to be art teachers willing to try new things and report results

BjB agrees with Susan.

PamelaS: Susan, would you please share some of the sites?

BjB: what about political cartoons?

PamelaS: Some teachers are fearful of entering a classroom if they are unarmed with all the answers. VC asks more questions than it gives answers.

JustinL: I have searched Visual Culture and lesson plans and get nothing

JustinL: and that needs to change

JustinL: Does that steer it to aesthetics?

JoshuaRW: image relevance plays a big part in a student's everyday existence, so having them bring in an image that speaks to them directs them to ask themselves: what is important to me? why did I pick this image? what does this image mean to me?

PamelaS: Sounds like an opportunity waiting to happen for some enterprising grad students

SusanVa: You can find quite a few links here:
<http://www.qesnrecit.qc.ca/workshops/multimodal/resources.html>

JustinL: Thanks Susan

PamelaS: That's a site to bookmark.

BjB adds the url to the Visual Culture folder in this room

MariaJM: those are great questions to ask Josh, and questions that you can't just beat around

PamelaS: Josh makes excellent points, as usual!

JustinL: Relevancy

JustinL: that is important to learning

PamelaS: Back to the question

MariaJM: I think that the more you can pick apart and really try to analyze what you are seeing, the closer you can get to understanding visual culture

JustinL: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/>

JustinL: that is a link to a film every teen should see

JustinL: And it's free online!!

MollyJD: Is every aspect of visual culture equally relevant for study, or are there certain aspects (advertisement, music videos, or whatever) that deserve special attention?

JoshuaRW: Students have a direct impact upon their culture, visual and all, and they express themselves in certain ways, as we all do, and by investing in the time to explore such imagery speaks volumes to their personal and social growth.

JustinL: good question Molly

PamelaS: Is VC the death of art as some are saying?

JustinL: Solving this question is going to take the new art educators, doing some learning and the seasoned veterans, learning as well.

JustinL: I guess Pam

JustinL: I have seen articles about that

JustinL: "the sky is falling"

PamelaS: I disagree about it being the death. I think it is a rebirth.

JustinL: I believe that making students aware of their surroundings has always been part of learning about art

MollyJD: Perhaps in a sense, but that kind of change that is considered a "death" - of asking always what art is - is happening with or without VC, and is what a great deal of contemporary art is about

MollyJD: And it's art educators' duty to show that in the classroom

JoshuaRW: We, as teachers, have the awesome responsibility to direct student learning in ways that personally affect them, and therefore we must be willing to use all of the tools that are available such as tv to explore the meaning behind these cultural images in order to help develop a visual reading style

JoshuaRW: VC helps to explain art

MariaJM: ... visual literacy

JoshuaRW: exactly, Maria

PamelaS: Pam makes the sound like the audience used to make on Arsenio Hall Show.

JustinL: At the NAEA I saw one session where there were 10 lessons in VC...but the finished pieces looked like a "normal art class", I will be willing to share them via e-mail

PamelaS: Joshua is right on.

JustinL falls off chair

MollyJD: Lol

JustinL: it shows what a society values...right?

PamelaS: Joshua makes a great point

PamelaS: Visual reading style --- that's a wonderful phrase.

MollyJD: I like that phrase too

PamelaS: BJ, don't you think that would be a terrific research paper?

BjB nods solemnly

MollyJD: It's like in iconography - the artists didn't speak of "painting" but rather of "writing icons"

PamelaS: Justin, how were the NAEA lesson presented? Were they typical production?

JustinL: Some were...

JustinL: but with tremendous personal exploration

JustinL: Current events

SusanVa: This looks like an interesting site
<http://www.ncrel.org/engage/skills/vislit.htm>

JustinL: Social issues

PamelaS: Did the presenters give any hints about how they taught their students to explore?

JustinL: It came back to the word...Relevant

JustinL: Making the assignment "real", help the learning process

MollyJD: How do you determine if something's relevant or not?

PamelaS: Sounds like a new human commonality. We all seek relevance in life.

MariaJM: that was huge at the conference.

JustinL: Talking to your students

JustinL: listening

JustinL: watching tv, staying abreast of new trends for young people

PamelaS: It seems to me...

PamelaS: That giving students a few tools (e.g., a couple of questions)

MollyJD: Isn't it also about showing students how artwork can be relevant, even if they might not immediately and spontaneously find it so?

PamelaS: that they can take home and answer as they watch TV is one way to determine some sort relevance.

PamelaS: Molly -- certainly. Finding meaning in art means finding relevance, don't you think?

JoshuaRW: I don't see VC as simply an art, VC is a tool to further the study of art images, and understand that everything has a purpose. And purpose is in everything.

JustinL: Which makes watching TV less passive and more active

MariaJM: I agree, I don't think that in high school the "why" questions were really pressed.

JustinL: nice thought Josh

PamelaS: I think Joshua is on the right track.

JustinL: Who here critically watches TV?

PamelaS: Who will admit that they watch TV?

JustinL: lol

MariaJM: I don't actually watch tv. that's really true.

BjB: who has time to watch TV!

MollyJD: I don't have one...

JoshuaRW: I don't have a TV because when I did, I watched it VERY critically

JustinL: like too much?

JoshuaRW: exactly

BjB: but, the kids we teach do watch TV

JustinL: What do you choose to watch? maybe a better question...movies,

JoshuaRW: that is why TV is a tool to be used in the classroom

BjB nods

JustinL: If you assign you class to watch tv for an hour, and analyze what they see...what would that do?

JustinL: With good questions of course

BjB: you would need to be more specific about 'analyze'

MariaJM: it would force them to focus. this could then, hopefully, be carried home.

JoshuaRW: critical reading (VC) and writing gives students the means to explore what and why they watch something

JustinL: when are commercials, what are they

PamelaS: I would hope that they'd see some sort of pattern emerge. That they'd see how they are being manipulated.

BjB: is there product placement in the show? What kind of clothing do the actors wear?

JustinL: are there stereotypes presented in the show, in commercials

JustinL: Is the show they are watching art?

BjB nods...good, Justin

JustinL: are any of the commercials

DonGst23: I don't want to sound critical, but . . . you all seem to be struggling with the obvious. SEEING, for those of us that can, is too often "assumed" to be part of life - you all are doing it now! Don't you think TEACHING the value of the gift is an important part of education? Many people never understand that they CAN SEE - this is tragic. This gift can be, unfortunately, manipulated by diverse interest groups (politics, public relations, "spin", etc.). Why not REALLY educate people on the REALITY? Visual art plays a tremendous role in CULTURE relative to the interpretation of "meaning" and "purpose". We experience it every day - nature, art, TV, computers, Let's teach the meaning of VISION and how to use it - POSITIVELY!

BjB: and what makes you remember a commercial?

JoshuaRW: is there propoganda in the commercials/shows?

BjB . o O (and the product that is actually being sold)

JustinL: another activity I thought of is channel surf, surf every channel on tv, tape, or TIVO it and see for those 3 seconds what is on tv, I bet a pattern would emerge

JustinL: Nice Don

JustinL: Pam it does seem to come back to meaning and purpose

PamelaS: Yeh, I think so.

JoshuaRW: That's exactly what we're talking about here

JustinL: So is meaning and purpose at the heart of visual culture

PamelaS: I think it is important to remember that as art teachers we have the power to help students see in different ways

MariaJM: I'm sorry, but I have to leave early. excellent topic for discussion. thank you.

BjB: whose meaning and whose purpose?

JustinL: exactly

JustinL: that is where exploration is

JustinL: society?

JustinL: our culture?

JustinL: me?

JustinL: you?

PamelaS: I am thinking that kids need to find their own meaning and purpose while critically looking at what society or the media or art or whatever throws at them.

PamelaS: Think Ernest Boyer: We all seek meaning and purpose.

JustinL: making those decisions are vital to living...teach them how to think...not what to think

JustinL: And hopefully create quality, thoughtful, citizens

JoshuaRW: that's it: looking critically at VC and then have them develop their own meaning, how it relates to them, society, and the whole of humanity

PamelaS: Well, I think I'll go watch American idol now.

JustinL rolls eyes

BjB chuckles. Justin, you wanted to suggest a follow up?

JustinL: I would love to get back on this topic

JustinL: in a month or two, and recruit some more people

MollyJD: And give a presentation on it at the conference?

JustinL: anyone want to get back together on this?

PamelaS: Sure.

JoshuaRW: absolutely

JustinL: me/ thumbs up to molly

BjB: you can also create a thread on the discussion board, Justin. Then any member of this ArtsSites group can give input

JustinL: There are links on the artsites page too!

JustinL: I will work on that

BjB: . o O (that lets people who are not able to join the discussions in real time have an opportunity to contribute to the dialogue)

PamelaS: I'd like to see some links to activities.

JustinL: Yes

PamelaS: Do any of you have Blogs?

BjB: on the screen above this chat window is a folder for Visual Culture

JoshuaRW: yes I have a blog

BjB: please add links that you feel are relevant

PamelaS: Perhaps we can use our Blogs and link them to this. Just a thought.

JustinL: That would be interesting...

PamelaS: BJ, thanks for hosting us tonight.

JustinL: Thanks everyone for sharing

PamelaS: Justin, thanks for the guidance.

BjB: my pleasure, Pam! Justin did a good job.

JustinL: thank you...

BjB cheers for Justin

JoshuaRW: Thank you, Justin!

JustinL: no thank you Josh!

BjB: thanks for your contributions, Molly and Josh

MollyJD: Excellent discussion *adds more thanks*

PamelaS: G'night all.

BjB: the next ArtsSites discussion is on May 4

BjB waves goodnight

MollyJD: Bye everyone

DonGst23: Very interesting! A final note from an neophyte. Teach your students to KNOW they are ALIVE!. Letting them explore and discover is very important - in fact, it's necessary. Don't dictate. Direct, challenge, coach, care! The most important CARE! Hope you all can make a difference!

BjB: love that passion, Don

PamelaS: Thanks, Don. Join this wild group another time.