

Form and content

In art and art criticism, form and content are considered distinct aspects of a work of art. The term form refers to the work's composition, techniques and media used, and how the elements of design are implemented. It mainly focuses on the physical aspects of the artwork, rather than the context in the artwork itself, such as color, value, space, etc. Content, on the other hand, refers to a work's subject matter, significance and style. Namely, the meaning behind the artwork, or context.



Saxicola maurus indicus on

Juniperus formosana - Gould

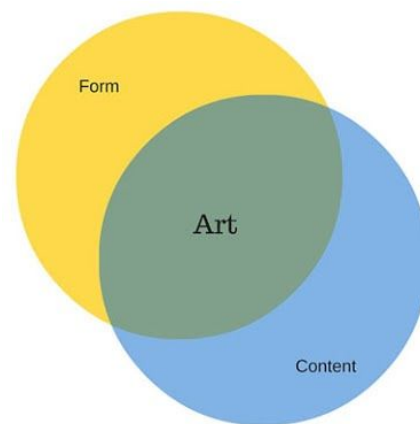


Jade bird

The subject of these two artworks is a bird, though both artworks are created in different styles. One is a two-dimensional

artwork of two birds resting on a tree branch, created in a natural style, with realistic proportions. On the other hand, the jade bird carving, created with exaggerated proportions and a stylized expression, creates a different emotional content. In other words, the content of the artwork changes based on the artist decision's use of form.

Art is a combination of form and content.



Form is the physical manifestation of the artwork.

It answers these types of questions:

- what is it made out of (the medium)?
- what techniques are used?
- how were the design elements and principles used?
- what is the style (abstract, impressionistic, etc)?

Content is the essence of the artwork.

It answers these types of questions:

- what is the subject/theme?
- what is the context?
- what is the meaning/intention?
- why was this artwork created?

These are the two basic considerations we need to be acquainted with. Form is the physical and visible characteristics inherent in works of art, and content is the meaning we derive from them. Formal distinctions include a work's size, medium (painting, drawing, sculpture or other kind of work) and descriptions of compositional elements such as the lines, shapes and colors involved. Issues of content include any visual clues that provide an understanding of what the art tells us. Sometimes an artwork's content is vague or hidden and needs more information than is present in the work itself. Ultimately these two terms are roped together in the climb to understand what art has to offer us. As we examine art from different time periods, styles and cultures, the issues of form and content will apply to all of them.