



Sketches for "The Battle of Anghiari,"
Leonardo da Vinci, Accademia, Venice

A little bit of Art History...

The use of the term, *subject matter*, refers to the person or thing that is represented within the work of art. The subject matter of the human figure is one that has been used and explored for thousands of years (since art making began). Leonardo da Vinci was born in the village of Vinci in Italy on April 15, 1452. Though he was an artist of the High Renaissance, Leonardo was also a mathematician, botanist, inventor, engineer, architect and even musician. To the left is one of his studies for the painting, "The Battle of Anghiari." Leonardo's scientific studies in anatomy were used to understand the form of the human figure in order to translate it onto the two dimensional surface in his work as an artist, as well as to understand the form and functions of the human body itself. This was his *creative research*.

Investigate!

Take a look at Sol Kjøk's *String of Beads 43*. Consider line, shape, value, texture, and color. These are the five elements of design, and their use is a part of the artist's visual vocabulary.

Begin with line. How does the quality of the line change through the piece? Think about how the other elements of design vary across the composition as well. Does this in any way affect the way your eye moves across the piece? For example, what grabs your attention first? Second? Where does your eye move next?

While you are considering these characteristics, think about the visual hierarchy that results from the control of these elements. What does Kjøk want us to notice? What elements are linked and how so?

What does it mean?

Think about how the organization of the elements of design, and the choices that the artist makes, function to create meaning in the drawing. What might the string of beads represent? Why are the figures posed as they are? Are there any visual elements that seem to be repeated? What is Kjøk showing us?



String of Beads 45



String of Beads 43

Investigate!

Next, take a look at Kjøk's *String of Beads 45*. What similarities do you notice between this drawing and *String of Beads 43*? What is the importance of the subject matter? Remember, everything you see is a choice made by the artist. What is the significance of these nude figure drawings? Why are they nude?

What does it mean?

Kjøk says that her drawings and paintings are the "visual terminus" of a longer method; a process that is staged and performed by herself and others. What does the idea of this process add to the drawing?

Did you know?

- Objective art is art in which the subject is represented as closely as possible to its actual optical appearance
- Subjective art is art that reflects some personal viewpoint
- Realism is a type of art that maintains basic visual information of subject matter without going into extreme detail; realism, though representational, emphasizes expression and maintains the subjectivity of the artist
- Naturalism is a type of art in which objects are described in their actuality; the artist does not include their own personal interpretation
- Trompe l'oeil is a technique that when employed copies nature with exact detail in such a way that tricks the viewer into believing it is real; trompe l'oeil literally means “deceives the eye”



Investigate!

Take a look at Boris Zakic's *NeSvarnost*. Make a list of the words that come to mind when you first look at this painting. As you did before, consider the elements of design. At the same time, consider the subject matter and how it is treated. What is happening in the painting? Where do you think the figure begins? Where does it end?

What does it mean?

Think about how Zakic's use of paint changes the way we perceive the figure. What seems to be happening within the painting, and how does this create meaning? You may also consider the title of the piece. Zakic has shown a certain part of its text within the painting. What is the significance of the text?



Remember, as always, that what you see is there for a reason. Every line, shape, color, texture, and value is a part of the artist's visual vocabulary. These elements are arranged using the Principles of Organization (*balance, proportion, dominance, movement, economy, harmony, and variety*). In the end these elements and their arrangements have a reason for being developed as they are. Use these clues to help determine the meaning of the piece. Although Zakic approaches the figure in a traditional manner, it is evident that in some areas his approach is non-traditional. How is he using the figure, and why?

Investigate!

Take a look at Zakic's *Viewer Friendly*. What similarities and differences do you notice between this painting, and *NeSvarnost*? Much more of the figure is shown in this painting. Why might the figure be posed as it is? It might help to first brainstorm ideas; create a list of words that immediately come to mind when you look at this painting and the figure (subject matter) within it.

What does it mean?

Consider every visual element within the image. What objects do you see? What do you not see? Now put these ideas together: the treatment of the subject matter, the arrangements of the elements of design, the inclusion and placement of particular objects. It may be helpful to look to the title of the piece.

Taking it Further

The figure has long been a subject of creative research for students and professionals of art, design, and medicine. Because of its subtle nuances, it is one of the most difficult forms to render, and mastery over it entails years of regular practice drawing from life. Part of Manifest's goal as a Creative Research Gallery and Drawing Center, a center that recognizes the innate and pivotal importance of drawing, is to encourage the study of the human form. Manifest's Open Figure Sessions offer students and artists the weekly practice of honing the skills involved in mastering the human form, much as Sol Kjøk and Boris Zakic have mastered it. We are human, and it is the body to which we instinctively relate as we look at images in our society. As such, the image of the figure can become a powerful, expressive tool for artists.