

# Before you begin...

This resource is in presentation style, for use with Power Point or as a printed handout. It can be used as part of pre-visit preparation, to accompany a visit, or can stand alone. It consists of 2 parts:

**PART ONE:** information, images and ideas for students

- About contemporary art
- Approaching contemporary art
- In my opinion
- Cross curricular opportunities
- Helpful hints for visiting
- Useful links

**PART TWO:** notes for teachers

- Cross curricular opportunities
- Useful links and additional resources

**NAVIGATE**

- Press escape to leave full screen mode
- Click to change page or use arrow keys to move through document

**GETTING THE  
MOST FROM  
CONTEMPORARY  
ART**







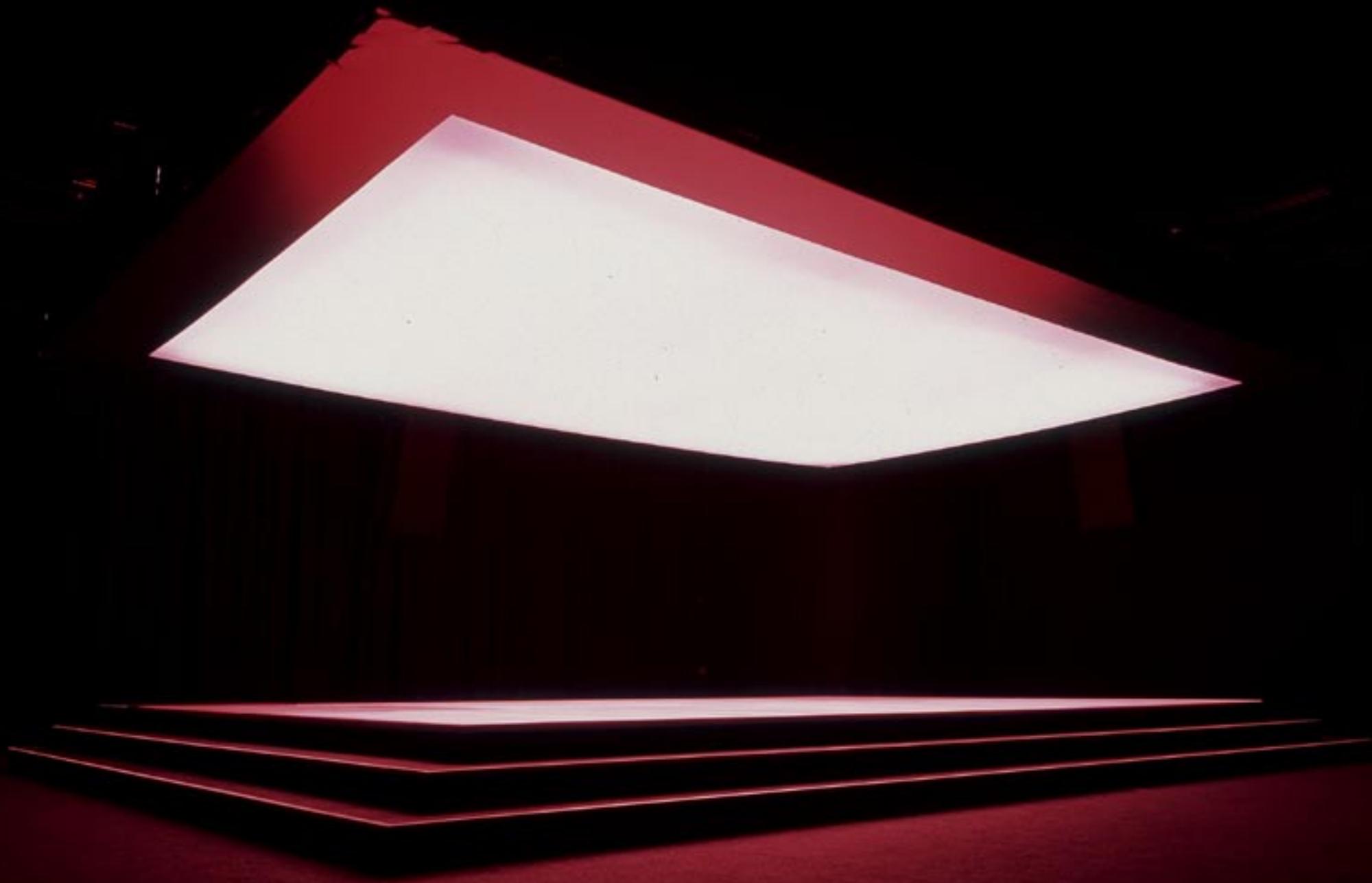
YOU  
CANNOT  
HELP  
LOOKING  
AT  
THIS











# About contemporary art

## What does 'Contemporary Art' mean?

It means that the art belongs to the present day. A contemporary artist is alive today and makes art works to show in galleries and public spaces. Unlike **modern art**, **contemporary art** is not defined by a list of schools of art, time periods or styles of art.

Some contemporary art is also called conceptual art.

In **conceptual art**, the artist will focus on what their work is about, as well as how it is experienced by other people. The artist concentrates on how best to explain their ideas (or concepts) to the viewer by using visual clues. Conceptual art can be in many forms, it could be a video, performance, words or photos. Sometimes, in conceptual art, there is no object at all. Conceptual art can be hard to collect or keep because the artist's own experience can be the work of art. It often makes us think about **what a work of art can be**.



# About contemporary art

**Contemporary art** might be created by one artist, or it might be **collaborative work**.

Collaborative work means that the artist might work with another person, a group or an organisation or institution. Some artists form long term working collaborations with another artist.

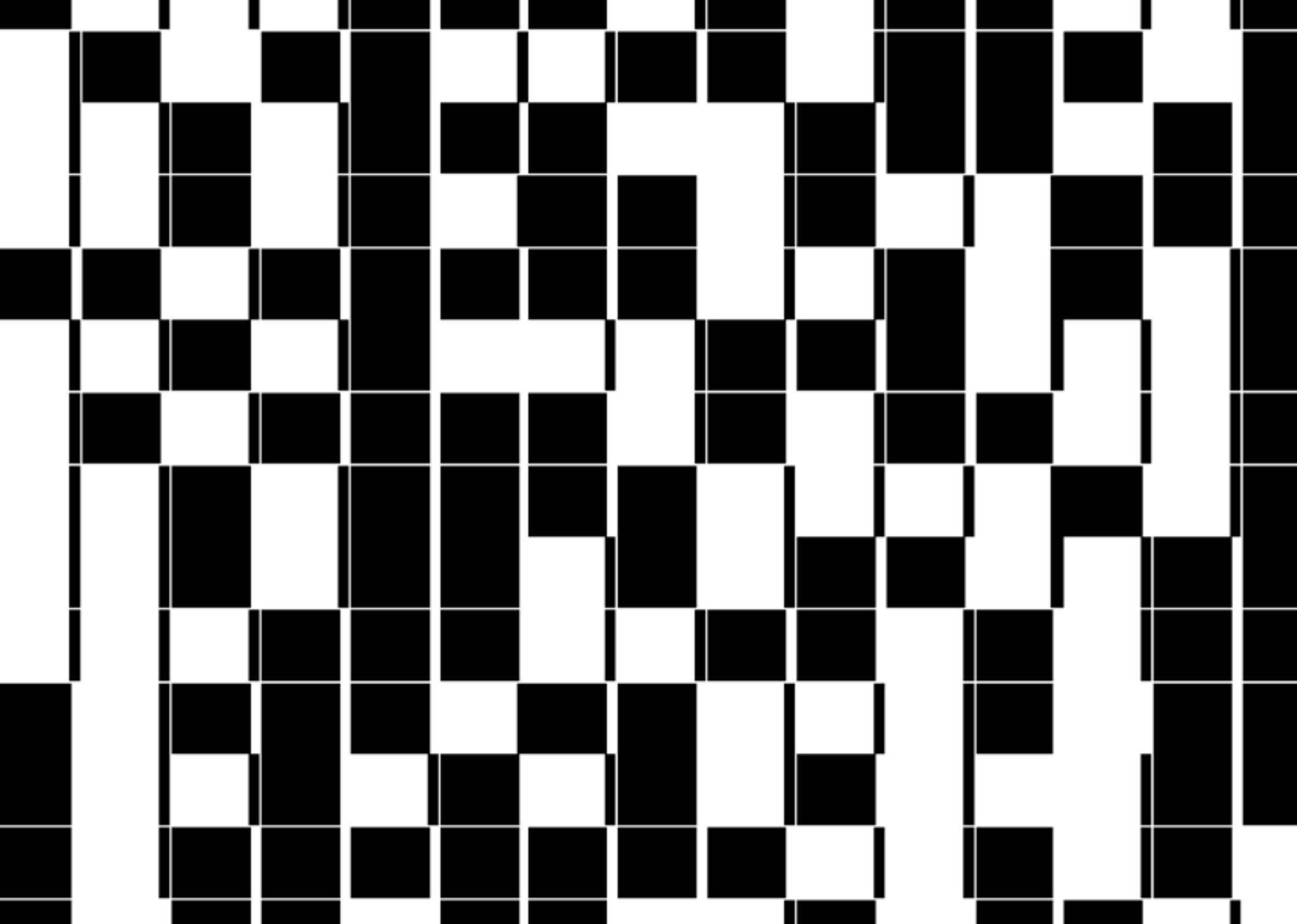
Some contemporary art will be **installation art**. This is when the work of art has been created to fit into a specific space or architectural situation. Installations often ask us to use **multiple senses** when experiencing the art: sight, smell, touch, and hearing.



# Approaching contemporary art

## **What is the best way to approach contemporary art ?**

It is very important that you have an **open mind**. You need to be prepared for new experiences and new knowledge. Don't try to form an opinion in the first few moments that you see the art; take time to consider it. It may not be what you are used to, that's why it is important to spend time getting used to it.



# Approaching contemporary art

## **How does an artist work?**

Artists use the **creative process**:

This is what they experience when they make their art.

Art can be about you. It can be about where you come from.

It can express opinions. It can ask questions.

It can be about how you see your life, how you see the world.

**Art can be about anything.**

# Approaching contemporary art

Every work of art requires the artist to make **choices**. They choose the subject matter. Once the artist has experimented with their ideas, they decide how they want to create the art. They choose a technique or materials, or they choose a combination of materials. Many contemporary artists use unconventional tools and materials in their work, they bring new ideas for working with materials and techniques to art. By doing this, they change the way that others see art. They challenge the traditional ways of making art.

Some artists want to create as accurate a picture of the world as possible.

Other artists may want to present **ideas, emotions, feelings**.







# Approaching contemporary art

## Looking

Remember that people are often impressed by Art because it looks as though it was difficult to do. Realistic work often seems to require the most skill, to be the most difficult to do. But work which also requires a lot of **thought** and **concept** is just as important.

- Art is not always pretty to look at or to experience.
- Art is not always easy to understand, but it can be interesting.
- Working out what makes it interesting to you is the key to understanding modern art and contemporary art.
- There is never just one interpretation of a work of art.

# Approaching contemporary art

**Your opinions and your reactions are as meaningful as anyone else's**, especially if you look carefully and think about what you see ( and feel ).

In fact, it is very interesting to hear how other people see and interpret the art that you are looking at. It is really important that we are all allowed to have our own opinions, there is no right and there is no wrong in this.





# Things to think about

When you start to experience the art, you may have already found out some information about it before the visit. The exhibition (or installation) will have a title. The exhibition might be the work of one artist or it might be a collection of work from a group of artists. Collect a leaflet from the gallery help you with this “finding out.”

The title will give you a clue as to what the art exhibition is all about.

When you walk into the gallery/installation, **stop** and look at the whole space around you.

- Is a collection of different art works in the one gallery?
- Is it one work of art or is it an installation?

Stopping to look will help you to see the size of the art work or art works. Look at the floors, the ceiling and the walls. Listen out for noises and sounds which might be part of the work. Don't rush around the room. Choose where you want to start or start where your teacher asks you to start. Although it is often useful to walk around with another person or a group, make sure you try hard to make your up your own mind about the art work.

# Things to think about

## Ask yourself these questions:

- What are my immediate **feelings** about the art work?
- What does the work look like? ( Imagine you are **describing** it to someone on the phone )
- What is the work **made of**?
- Where is it **situated** in the gallery, and is this important ?
- Do I need to do anything other than to **look**? Do I need to listen to anything? Do I need to **walk around** the art work? Do I need to be **closer** to it or do I need to be further away from it?
- Is the **title** of the work important?



# Things to think about

Often, a piece of art has a **title**, written on a label, usually on the wall space near the art work. **Read them.** They give the artist name, the title of the work, sometimes the date and sometimes they tell you what the art work is made from. Sometimes they don't have a title, so you may need to think about the reason for this when you look at the art work.

An artist often describes a story behind their work, this can be in the title, in the materials they choose, the colours, the size, the shape. These are often clues to help us to try and understand what they are trying to express. It is alright to be confused or feel that you don't understand the work. This then means you can ask questions about the work.



# In my opinion

If you like the art work, you should try and ask yourself **WHY** you like it.

You should make a note of the title and the artist's name  
You can find out dates and what the art work is made from.

You could draw a sketch of this. Remember that a drawing is putting lines on a paper, it can be very quick or like a diagram. It helps you to remember the art work later back at school or at home.

Writing down **KEY** words will help you to remember the art work, the key words can describe the art itself, or describe your feelings when you look at and experience the art. It does not have to be written in sentences.

You can use one of the prompt sheets that we have to help record the way you feel about the piece of art work.



WILL I  
EVER  
FIND LOVE?

ANCE

FECT

PERFECT

SILENCE

vanity

Europ

STORIES of LOVE



# In my opinion

You could work with a friend or with a small group and discuss the art work.

Share your thoughts, your feelings and your ideas with each other.

Share your thoughts, feelings, your ideas with your teacher.

By investigating, looking, questioning, discussing, and thinking you will be doing what the artist hoped for, you will be looking for the meaning behind the art work as well as at the art work itself.

This means you will be trying to find out about, and understand, the **concepts**.









# Further research

Choose one of the artists (or a collaborative group of artists) whose work you enjoyed on your visit. Use the internet to do research on them. Be selective with research, cutting and pasting information does not show an understanding of an artist. Read information, select it and then paste into a text document. Insert images of work that you like. It may not be work that you actually saw. Include title and date and any other information about the work. Then, add **your opinions** about the work.

**Describe it: shape, form, colour, size, materials and techniques used**

- Why do I like it?
- What does it “say” to me?
- How does it make me feel?

Choose your favourite piece by the artist and imagine you have bought it. Where would you like to display this, at home, in another space?

- Where and why?

Print out your work; paste it into a sketchbook or notebook. You can be creative in the way that you do this. Then, design and make a cover which links to the style of the art work that you have evaluated in the presentation.



# Teachers notes

## **Cross curricular opportunities**

Contemporary art is incredibly diverse and wide-ranging and can be used to support teaching and encourage creative thinking in all subject areas.

# Cross curricular opportunities

Contemporary art is incredibly diverse and wide ranging and can be used to support teaching and learning and to create creative thinking in all subject areas.

The new **key stage 3** specifications for Art and Design state that the key concepts and key processes should include “work in 2D,3D and new technologies, study of a wide range of artefacts from **contemporary**, historical, personal and cultural contexts “

The new specifications for **GCSE** art propose that students will have the capability to evaluate “a variety of approaches, methods, and intentions of **contemporary** and historical artists, craftspeople and designers from different cultures and their contribution to continuity and change in society “.

There will be a need for more emphasis on student ability to “present a personal, informed and meaningful response, demonstrating critical understanding, realising intentions, and where appropriate, making connections between visual, written, oral or other elements “

A visit to an art space can also be linked to the programmes of study for ICT and Citizenship

# Helpful hints for visiting

- Make sure you feel comfortable in the gallery – a pre visit is always advisable.
- Remember there are resources available to support your visit.
- Prepare your students for the visit – explain the context of contemporary art and encourage questions and debate, using visual images as a focus.
- Using the internet as a research tool is helpful and the gallery website will be informative and useful in pre-visit discussions.
- Many contemporary artists self promote on the internet through their own web pages or through **myspace** and **wikipedia**.
- Remember that your aim is to enable and encourage them to respond to the art work, it is not to give them answers.
- Students may need some form of support from documentation in the gallery. This might be prepared by you using templates provided by the gallery or you may choose to use a generic prompt sheet.
- The young people should be encouraged to look carefully, to discuss, to make brief notes using key words, to make quick sketches so that they record their experiences in a visual way.
- It is important to inform students that there is no right and wrong way to respond and some works of art are deliberately ambiguous.

# Links and additional resources

BALTIC

[www.balticmill.com](http://www.balticmill.com)

QUAY

[www.balticmill.com/quay](http://www.balticmill.com/quay)

Library and Archive

<http://archive.balticmill.com>

'In my opinion' toolkit to help pupils approach artwork,  
formulate questions and contribute opinions

<http://www.balticmill.com/learning/Downloads.php>

Blank presentation template: pupils can use this to  
present their own research and ideas

<http://www.balticmill.com/learning/Downloads.php>

Baltic Secondary Resources Bank: pupils can use this to  
search for and download images and other information

<http://www.balticmill.com/learning/Downloads.php>

[www.balticmill.com](http://www.balticmill.com)