
Form & Content Lists

A project to help you focus and refine your aesthetic curiosities, formal experiments and commitments, and begin to visually communicate your content more effectively and clearly.

FORM

First, at a relaxed moment in your day, make an exhaustive list of all the things of formal interest to you. These are the visual, formal elements you love seeing in yours and others work. Observe as you walk through the streets. What moves you? What images seem to repeat themselves? This list is only concerned with aesthetics. Be as specific as possible.

Categories to give you ideas & get you started. Start with the general and move toward the specific:

Materials – paint (oil, acrylic, watercolor, gouache, ink, gels, mediums, etc.); sculpture (traditional – stone, metal, clay, plaster or “unmonumental” – building materials, found materials or traditional craft materials like paper mache, knitting, etc.).

Color – synthetic, artificial, or organic. If you’re making sculpture – the colors inherent in the materials? If you’re using paint – right out of the tube? Specifically describe instead of saying color or bright color or a “general” palette, list specific combinations of colors, saturation levels, contrast levels, values levels, etc.

Textures – Paintbrush (or not) application, types of strokes, stains, drips, scratches, etc., and the same for any other material. What does it already have OR what are you going to do to it to transform it? Rigid, mechanical, or what water does to it? Do you want the patina of age or experience or the fresh new feel of lacquer?

Compositions – different types of compositions (balanced, teetering off kilter, combustible, networks or biomorphic) within a picture plane, within an architectural space (i.e. on the floor, up in the ceiling), or outside on a billboard or strung between two trees or buildings?

Size – scale – post card size picture plane with monumental brush-strokes, or monumental sculptures with microscopic marks. An almost invisible work in a huge empty space or a giant inflatable work filling a smaller space.

Imagery – Abstraction (different kinds organic, geometric, etc.), Representation (photorealism, expressionism, etc.), Process derived, Mechanical/Digital Reproduction, etc.

Process – or the action of doing something, performance, relational aesthetics, including; sounds (rhythmic, repetitive, linear narrative, movement, action (mundane, everyday, dramatic, operatic, meditative, solemn, etc.)

Anything else? Perhaps something that you've always wanted to paint, draw, sculpt, build, act out, or other activity? These are the artistic expressions that have been on the periphery of your imagination that you bring with you but have been on the back burner. What are they and how can they get the focus of your attention?

CONTENT

Make a second exhaustive list of all the things you want your work to communicate. Again, be as specific as possible.

Subject matter – You can call it your subject matter, narrative, content, concept, etc. You haven't chosen to write a great novel or compose a major concerto, you've chosen to communicate visually. So what are you communicating?

Response – Another way to think about this is – what is the response you want your work to illicit? Educate, infuriate, titillate, announce, please, insult, obscure, promote, camouflage, signify, pacify, repel, confound, entice, amaze, encourage, etc. What psychological impact you want viewers of your work to feel or think about when they spend time with your work.

Concepts – List issues, concerns, ideas, thoughts, beliefs, objectives, opinions.

Influences – List sources of material such as newspapers, current events, tv shows, novels, poetry, operas, music, theatre, people, philosophies, ideologies, academia, corporate culture, civic responsibility, etc.

Anything else? Perhaps there are topics you don't yet know much about, or perhaps you are still discovering your way through your practice. This is OK. Take your time and enjoy the process. Take yourself on a journey. Make the list over and over again and over again. Be brave!

CONNECT THE TWO

Now read over both lists and start connecting the dots. What imagery comes to mind when you link a few of the formal concerns together? What content would that imagery reinforce? What from the content list sparks some aesthetic formal attributes? Spend some time analyzing your concerns now that you've broken them down into two areas.