The visual arts

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
ADVANCED | C1

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each advanced term with its definition.

1 iconography ____	**a** the study of symbols and visual imagery within artworks
2 formalism ____	**b** a critical approach focused on form, composition and technique rather than subject or context
3 ekphrasis ____	**c** a vivid written description of a visual artwork
4 verisimilitude ____	**d** the quality of appearing convincingly real or lifelike
5 appropriation ____	**e** the deliberate reuse of existing imagery or styles, often reframing their meaning
6 pastiche ____	**f** a work imitating the style of previous artists, sometimes as tribute
7 connoisseurship ____	**g** refined, expert judgement in evaluating art
8 didactic ____	**h** intended primarily to teach or instruct, sometimes at the expense of artistry
9 site-specific ____	**i** created for and dependent on a particular physical location
10 subversive ____	**j** intended to undermine or challenge established norms

2 Choose the most precise term for each context.

1 The study of symbolic visual imagery is iconography / decoration.

2 A focus on form over subject is formalism / narrative analysis.

3 A written description of a visual work is ekphrasis / caption.

4 The deliberate reuse of existing imagery is appropriation / plagiarism denial.

5 A work imitating an earlier style, as tribute, is pastiche / forgery.

6 Expert, refined judgement of art is connoisseurship / guesswork.

7 A work intended mainly to teach is didactic / purely decorative.

8 A work created for and dependent on one location is site-specific / portable.

3 Match the verbs with the noun phrases to form academic collocations.

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1 subvert ____	**a** viewer expectations
2 interrogate ____	**b** a cultural narrative
3 destabilise ____	**c** fixed meaning
4 reframe ____	**d** existing imagery
5 evoke ____	**e** an emotional response
6 appropriate ____	**f** a notion of authenticity
7 problematise ____	**g** a work as masterful
8 canonise ____	**h** received wisdom

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4 Complete the analysis with terms from the box.

appropriation | connoisseurship | didactic | ekphrasis | formalism | iconography | pastiche | site-specific | subversive | verisimilitude

Art historians trained in 1 _____ examine recurring symbols across periods, tracing how meaning shifts even when visual motifs persist. Critics working within a 2 _____ tradition, by contrast, deliberately set aside subject matter to analyse composition and technique alone. Contemporary artists frequently engage in 3 _____, reworking familiar imagery to challenge its original context, a strategy some critics find genuinely 4 _____ and others dismiss as derivative 5 _____. Writers responding to visual art through 6 _____, a vivid verbal rendering of an image, add a further interpretive layer beyond the work itself. Meanwhile, traditional 7 _____, the connoisseur's trained eye, remains valuable for authentication even as digital tools increasingly assist in assessing 8 _____. A 9 _____ installation, tied irrevocably to its physical setting, resists the kind of straightforwardly 10 _____ interpretation that museum wall texts sometimes impose.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Interpretation and authority in art criticism

Contemporary art criticism increasingly interrogates its own authority, questioning whether any single interpretive framework, whether formalist, iconographic or biographical, can adequately account for a work's full range of meaning. This scepticism has practical consequences for museums, which must decide how much interpretive guidance to offer visitors without foreclosing alternative readings. Appropriation art complicates the picture further, since a work reusing existing imagery invites viewers to interrogate the relationship between original and reframed meaning, rather than settling on a fixed verdict. Some critics argue that this openness represents intellectual honesty; others worry that excessive interpretive relativism leaves audiences without any stable ground for evaluating artistic merit at all.

1 What does contemporary art criticism increasingly interrogate? _____

2 What practical consequence does this scepticism have for museums? _____

3 How does appropriation art complicate the picture further? _____

4 What do some critics argue this openness represents? _____

5 What do others worry excessive interpretive relativism leaves audiences without? _____

6 Can a single interpretive framework fully account for a work's meaning, per the text? _____

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6 **Replace the words in bold with a precise term or collocation.**

1 The artist reused existing imagery to challenge its meaning. _____

2 The painting looked strikingly true to life. _____

3 The work seemed designed mainly to teach a lesson. _____

4 The installation only made sense within its physical location. _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 160-190 word critical commentary on how interpretive authority operates in art criticism, distinguishing observation from inference and evaluating competing critical frameworks.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Include four academic collocations. [ ] Maintain a precise, balanced register.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Advanced terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Precise terms

1 iconography 2 formalism 3 ekphrasis 4 appropriation 5 pastiche 6 connoisseurship 7 didactic 8 site-specific

3 Academic collocations

1 a subvert viewer expectations 2 h interrogate received wisdom 3 c destabilise fixed meaning 4 b reframe a cultural narrative 5 e evoke an emotional response 6 d appropriate existing imagery 7 f problematise a notion of authenticity 8 g canonise a work as masterful

4 Analysis

1 iconography 2 formalism 3 appropriation 4 subversive 5 pastiche 6 ekphrasis
7 connoisseurship 8 verisimilitude 9 site-specific 10 didactic

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Its own authority.
2 They must decide how much interpretive guidance to offer without foreclosing alternative readings.
3 It invites viewers to interrogate the relationship between original and reframed meaning rather than settling on a fixed verdict.
4 Intellectual honesty.
5 Any stable ground for evaluating artistic merit.
6 No, according to the scepticism described.

6 Precise terms and collocations

1 appropriation 2 verisimilitude 3 didactic 4 site-specific

Over to you

Answers will vary. Look for conceptual precision, evidence-aware reasoning and balanced evaluation.