Context:

“Context includes a multiplicity of issues: original setting, historical events, social, religious and political developments, patronage, and function.”

Four Ways to Think of Context:

1. Physical location of the work of art in its original setting

*Where the work of art was originally situated?*

1. Artist and patron of the work of art

*Who was the artist?*

*Who was the person who commissioned this work of art? (patron)*

1. Historical events which influence the work of art

*What is the historical relevancy of the work of art?*

*What are the historical events that occur or are represented in this work of art?*

*What is the impact of the piece of art?*

1. Concepts and idea which surround the work

*What religious, social, or philosophical ideas within the culture influence the content or presentation of the work of art?*

By studying the works of art and architecture using contextual information, we address essential questions, such as:

* Why is this work significant to the time and generation it was created?
* How do ideas or beliefs shared by the artist, his or her immediate community or society, shape the work of art?
* What influences the artist’s or patron’s choice of subject matter?
* What role do historical, political, religious, cultural events and economic developments influence the presentation of the subject matter?
* How do issues of gender, class, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation influence the choice and presentation of the subject matter?
* How do building and architectural programs express the values and political agendas of their patrons?
* What is the intended purpose or function, of the work?

**Context Cont…**

**Content** is often determined by the function or the intended purpose of the work of art within the culture. It is what the work of art is about, specifically its subject matter. Works of architecture do not have “content” but architects choose architectural styles and building motifs to support the building function.

**Style-** is the presentation of the content in a distinctive artistic manner:

Period Style is the characteristic style of a specific time.

Regional style is the style of a particular geographical area

Personal style is an individual artist’s unique manner.

**Formalism**- places the emphasis on the design qualities in a work of art, rather than its subject. Under Formalism**,** art is appreciated not for its expression but instead for the forms of its components:

The elements,

Methods of composition,

Stylized shapes,

Visual elements

“Form is the "common denominator" among all things classified as art.” Clive Bell

**Formalism** emphasizes the:

style of execution,

like brush strokes,

color combinations,

lines,

light, and

other structural aspects.

In effect, such works are measured in the terms of their perceptual impact, instead of their sentimental force. Abstract art genres Impressionism and Post-Impressionism (particularly, the works of Paul Cézanne) were the significant influences on the development of Formalism.

**Styles:**

[Abstract Expressionism](http://www.usc.edu/schools/annenberg/asc/projects/comm544/library/styles/AbstractExpressionism.html)  
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