

# The Importance of Vision and Visual Culture

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers the influence of nonverbal, visual communication, and how artistry aids in the development of critical thinking skills:

## 1. Influence of Visual Communication

**Visual culture**, a field of academic study that emphasizes the cultural meaning of a work of art rather than its aesthetic value, often involves the analysis of visual communication.

This type of communication can be a form of nonverbal persuasion, whether or not it's intended that way. Because it functions on a subconscious level, the effects can sometimes be quite persuasive; advertisers, marketers, and propagandists know this.

Visual propaganda is a way people try to influence others by projecting their belief systems through pictures or film. The Nazis in particular were notorious for their use of political and ideological propaganda.

These advertisers, marketers, and propagandists rely on snap judgments. Pictures can be very persuasive simply because visual images tend to stick in people's minds, and people are quick to make judgments on what they see. These judgments can then become ingrained as facts without people even realizing it.

### IN CONTEXT

The following are some examples of propaganda. This type of visual persuasion has existed throughout time because it's very effective. Once the image takes hold, it's very difficult to disassociate it with the idea that it's connected to. This first image example is from the World War I era. It's a piece of war propaganda showing the Kaiser of Germany devouring the planet.



War propaganda from World War I

Here is a piece of Nazi propaganda showing the dangers of the Bolshevik Revolution, which was occurring in Russia at the time:



Nazi Propaganda from 1937

Here is a piece of propaganda that could be considered fine art, depicting King Louis of France, or

the Sun King, as he was known. This painting shows him as the god Jupiter:



Portrait of Louis XIV by Charles  
Poerson

This is a piece of propaganda from 15th century Europe, showing the Ottomans, or the Ottoman Turks, in a very negative light:



Anti-Muslim propaganda in Germany  
from 16th century

Propaganda has existed as long as there's been politics and artwork to go along with it. Visual propaganda has existed in many different forms; this aggressive method of **advertising** can thus have a strong influence on

**mass culture**, or ideas developed from the exposure to the same media.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Visual Culture

A field of academic study that emphasizes the cultural meaning of a work of art rather than its aesthetic value

##### Advertising

The act or profession of calling attention to one's products and services through paid announcements in print and other communications media

##### Mass Culture

The set of ideas and values developed through exposure to the same broadcast, print, and Internet media outlets

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## 2. Importance of Critical Thinking

To fight the power of persuasion, you need to use **critical thinking**, or purposeful reflective judgment involving an investigation of assumptions and hidden values, and the careful evaluation of evidence.

#### IN CONTEXT

After the attacks of 9/11, images of the Taliban—and in particular Osama Bin Laden—were everywhere. Attacks on male members of the Sikh religion, whose adherents are required to wear a turban, skyrocketed following 9/11. Yet Sikhs are a religion centered in India, not in the Middle East, and they have no known group affiliation with the Taliban or terrorism at all. People simply associated the turban with the Taliban, and in turn, terrorism in general.

This is an example of how powerful images can be, and how strong the associations with information can be, regardless of whether that information is true or false.

Art history teaches you how to engage via critical thinking with images you encounter on a daily basis, making you more consciously aware of the visual information that's being interpreted.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Critical Thinking

Purposeful reflective judgment that involves an investigation of assumptions and hidden values, and the careful evaluation of evidence



#### SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you learned that people are often unaware of the **influence of visual communication**, a nonverbal form of persuasion that functions on a subconscious level. This type of advertising, particularly in the form of propaganda, has existed throughout time because it's very effective. Once the image takes hold, it's very difficult to disassociate it with the idea to which it's connected.

In relation to this, you also learned about the **importance of critical thinking** to fight the power of persuasion. Critical thinking is purposeful reflective judgment involving an investigation of assumptions and hidden values, and the careful evaluation of evidence. Art history promotes this type of thinking by making you more consciously aware of the context behind what you're viewing.

Good luck!

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Advertising**

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### **Critical Thinking**

Purposeful reflective judgment that involves an investigation of assumptions and hidden values, and the careful evaluation of evidence.

### **Mass Culture**

The set of ideas and values developed through exposure to the same broadcast, print, and internet media outlets.

### **Visual Culture**

A field of academic study that emphasizes the cultural meaning of a work of art rather than its aesthetic value.