



*Conversing in Art: Learning the Language of the Visual Arts* is an introductory-level art text for college students and others interested in developing their knowledge of art and improving their ability to see, understand, and discuss art by using the language of the visual arts.

This textbook is designed in a workbook format. Throughout the text, readers will be called on to respond, either visually or in words, to questions and prompts regarding the material just introduced. A workbook format provides continuous dialogue between the material presented and the student learning. The first chapter is an introduction and an invitation to join the centuries-old dialogue humans have carried on with what we call art through creating, viewing, and discussing art.

Section I covers “Art as Object” and pertains to the form of art. It is laid out in chapters that introduce the basic vocabulary of visual art, known as the visual elements, and composition, followed by two- and three-dimensional media.

Section II presents “Art as Message.” Students will explore content, looking at the subjects of and purposes for which art has been created.

Section III moves into “Art as Record” and discusses art in a context. These chapters will introduce aspects of art history as well as the significant influences of place, time, and culture on art. Readers will be challenged to consider differences and make connections between the arts from different places around the world and various historical times.

Section IV explores “Art as an Idea” introducing some theories about art and its nature plus a few of the issues and controversies current in the Artworld today.

The Conclusion invites readers to contemplate where they started from, how far they have progressed in their exploration of the arts through the use of this text, and whether they might want to go further.

At the end of each chapter, in addition to the in-text assignments, a list of alternate or extra assignments and exercises is provided. This additional material makes more in-depth explorations possible for any or all of the material covered. For teachers who use this textbook, these suggestions are some tools made available to build and expand on text coverage according to their own expertise and interests, and the needs of their students. This workbook can be assigned as homework, covered in class, or any combination of the two. This book can also function as an independent study course and be used by anyone interested in developing their understanding of art.

Studies consistently show that we learn best by doing. Research also indicates that students learn better if exercises pertinent to the material covered are presented right away, rather than at the end of a chapter (Rickards 1976, 13). In developing this book, I have also taken into consideration Howard Gardner’s studies on the different ways we learn and endeavored to include a variety of exercises to address multiple learning styles among students (Gardner, 1993).

For students to get the most benefit from this workbook format, they need to keep basic art supplies handy. My recommended list can be obtained easily and inexpensively. It includes the following: a pencil with an eraser, a black ink pen, a ruler, an inexpensive watercolor set, plus two other types of color sets. For maximum versatility, I recommend markers and colored pencils, but crayons or pastels would also work.

## ■ ENDNOTES

Gardner, H. 1993. *Frames of mind, the theory of multiple intelligences*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Basic Books.

Rickards, J. P. 1976. Stimulating high-level comprehension by interspersing questions in text passages. *Educational Technology*, 16 (11): 13–17.

