



The Importance of Vision and Visual Culture

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

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

1. [Influence of Visual Communication](#)
2. [Importance of Critical Thinking](#)

1. Influence of Visual Communication

Most people do not view art on a daily basis. They will rarely, if ever, visit a museum or read a book about art history. However, they will view hundreds, maybe even thousands of images as they view social media, play video games, or watch video clips on the internet. Art history can provide valuable tools that can teach people how to view mass media with a more critical eye.

Visual culture, a field of academic study that emphasizes the cultural meaning of a work of art rather than its aesthetic value, often involving 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.

- What is the message of this swimsuit advertisement?
- What is it trying to get you to do?
- What clues led you to this conclusion?

Oh what a beautiful
Splash

Be attractive whilst you're active

Jantzen

Obtainable only from retail stores

Jantzen opens the season with another glorious range of swim suits and sun clothes — stunning fabrics (14 of them), exciting styles (68 of them), and vibrant colours and patterns (73 of them). All this — and Jantzen's perfect permanent fit.

His "Aquaduck" Swim-suits, imported exclusively for your Jantzen. For all its smoothness, there's a built-in supporter and a concealed draw-cord that doesn't meet the eye. Six Jantzen be-colors to choose from: Black, Lemon-tint, Ice Blue, White, Royal, Flamingo. Price 35/-.

Hers "Flame Haven" — vivid, exotic — in Jantzen's exclusive new fabric, SATIN SLEEK! "Linen" swirls through glazing, raven giving you exceptional figure control with a beautifully soft gleam. The bra is subtly divided for firm, smooth uplift. Straps cross to a flattering U-shaped back. Price 65/-.

Artist unknown

Jantzen advertisement

Australian Women's Weekly

August 5, 1950

This image is from the 1950s and might appear heavy-handed by today's standards, but you might recall **advertising** from Instagram influencers, videos on TikTok, or other examples that are doing the same thing. You might also think about why people edit their photos, using filters or certain poses to make themselves look better. Or why they choose certain photos to post online in the first place. Are these images an accurate depiction of their lives? Why or why not?

Since visual communication is mostly nonverbal, it functions on a subconscious level. The effects can sometimes be quite persuasive; advertisers, marketers, and propagandists know this and use this awareness all the time.

Below you will see some examples of **propaganda**, which is information that is used to persuade people to adopt a certain viewpoint and can often be biased or misleading. Some of these examples come from the history of art, and some come from popular culture. Keep in mind that paintings, sculptures, and other works of fine art can also have a propagandistic function, similar to prints and other forms of advertising.

IN CONTEXT

Propaganda is a type of visual persuasion that has existed throughout time because it's very effective. Once the image takes hold, it's very difficult to disassociate it from 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.

- What viewpoint is this image trying to persuade the viewer to adopt?
- How would it have been used originally?
- Do you think it would have been successful?



Artist unknown

Illustration featuring a caricature of Kaiser Wilhelm II

Italy

1914

Here is an oil painting that also functions as propaganda. It depicts King Louis XIV of France, or the Sun King, as he was known. This painting shows him as the god Jupiter:

- What message does this painting convey?
- What details of the composition lead you to this conclusion?



Charles Poerson (1609–1667)

Portrait of Louis XIV as Jupiter Conquering the Fronde

Versailles, France

1652 - 1654

Oil on canvas

These are sculptures, known as lamassu, that were originally located inside palaces in Assyria, now part of northern Iraq. They are taller than people, and since they are creatures with the head of a man, eagle's wings, and the body of a lion, they look supernatural. Imagine if you were a person who lived at the time these works were made:

- How would you feel viewing one of them?
- What would be their function in terms of propaganda?
- Does this message change when the location of the sculptures changes from Nimrud (located in northern Iraq) to the British Museum?



Artist unknown

Lamassu, from the northwest Palace of Ashurnasirpal II

Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), Mesopotamia, Iraq

883-859 BCE, Neo-Assyrian era

Lastly, here is an image of propaganda from North Korea. There is no text accompanying this image that could influence you one way or another to have a specific opinion, and yet, it is very persuasive. This image appears to be a mosaic made up of small square tiles, and that would lead one to conclude that it is probably a mural on either an interior or exterior wall of a building.

- How do you interpret the message of this image?
- How might someone interpret this image in a different way, depending on whether they were from North Korea, tourists visiting the country, or people viewing this image on the internet?



Artist unknown

Propaganda Mural

Pyeongyang, North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)

Date unknown

Tile on wall

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 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.

Propaganda

Information that is used to persuade people to adopt a certain viewpoint and can often be biased or misleading.

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.

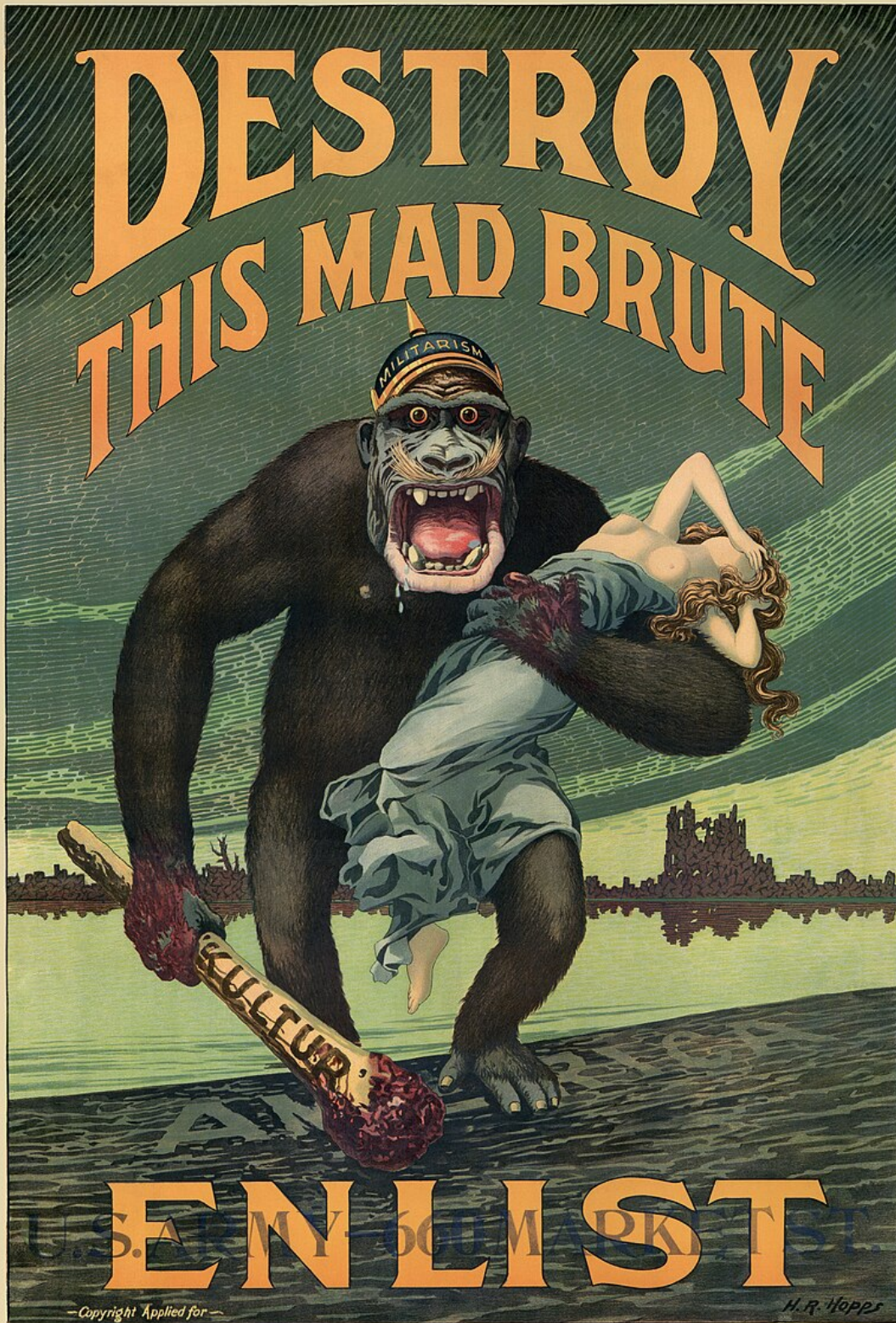
IN CONTEXT

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.

Below is an image of propaganda from World War I. It depicts Germans as gorillas, as less than human.

- What might be the effects of such an image?
- Could it influence prejudice against Germans?

You might think about what influences the development of prejudice, especially against certain groups of people, and how critical thinking can prevent this.



Harry Ryle Hopps (1869–1937)

Destroy this Mad Brute Enlist - U.S. Army

Washington D.C., USA

1917

Lithograph

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 from 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 messages that visual images can communicate.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Advertising

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

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.