

Zachary Gilliam  
Dr. Christine Munoz  
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## Visual Thinking Strategies

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Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a way of looking at and talking about art that helps people think more deeply and communicate better. There are no right or wrong answers, everyone shares what they notice, and the group listens and builds on each other's ideas. VTS encourages people to slow down, look closely, and explain their thinking. It also teaches them to listen to different perspectives and change their minds when they see new evidence.

Art is used in healthcare because it helps people heal, cope, and connect in ways that medicine alone sometimes can't. It reaches people emotionally and mentally, not just physically. Seeing art in a healthcare environment can help reduce stress and support emotional expression, something often lacking in clinical settings. Artwork along hospital hallways can make the space feel less like a cold labyrinth and more warm and human, fostering a sense of healing. Doctors also benefit from being surrounded by art, it can improve skills like empathetic observation, critical thinking, and communication. It also gives them opportunities to express themselves and connect with patients. As discussed in Gascho et al., patients and doctors formed meaningful connections through conversations about the doctors' portraits and hobbies. Art holds an important place in healthcare—from the patient's experience to the doctor's perspective, and especially in the connection between them that lies at the heart of care.

Walking through MERF, a space I visit often, with a focus on Visual Thinking Strategies, or viewing the building as if it were a work of art, completely changed my perspective. I used to see it as cold, lifeless, and soul-sucking. I avoided going there whenever possible because it didn't feel like a place for humans - only for robots. But now, after noticing all the effort by faculty, staff, and students to humanize the space, especially through their "communities," I think I might spend more time there. I realize I never gave it the appreciation it deserves, since I only associated it with the work I did inside: presentations, meetings, seminars, and symposia, all things I used to find boring.